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**The Burden of the Body:  
Selfhood and Representation in the Works of Dionne Brand**

**Candida Rifkind**

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of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Burden of the Body: Selfhood and Representation in the Works of Dionne Brand** Candida Rifkind

The works of Dionne Brand constitute an ongoing exploration of the formation and representation of the self. In the poems of *No Language is Neutral* (1990) and *Land to Light On* (1997), the short stories of *Sans Souci* (1989), and the novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), Brand develops a notion of subjectivity in which the interior self strives for full expression through the performances of its body. The self's ability to determine its corporeal performances, however, is regulated by social forces which 'read' bodies according to hierarchies of difference. This circumscription of performativity is particularly acute for Brand's Black female characters, whose bodies are regulated within the social sphere according to hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Because their bodies are perceived as different and therefore 'other,' Brand's characters cannot simply assume performative agency, but rather must struggle to articulate their selfhood through bodily performances which evade dominant regulations. Ironically, the body is at once the site of regulation and of resistance. Brand's works locate subjectivity within the corporeal to emphasize that desires -- whether for a whole self, for an other, for a home, or for full expression -- transgress dominant regulations of their bodies. This study approaches the texts thematically to assert that Brand's representation of Black female subjectivity is a critique of the discursive limitations which regulate the Black female body, as well as a representation of the agency possible through various alternative bodily performances.

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father, Cecil Rifkind.

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## CHAPTER 1: *Performing the Self*

I think that the only 'dark continent' is the one that lies beneath the surface of language (the skin that covers it over, masks and smooths 'it' out). Language is like a skin, both on the side of the body and out-side of the body, between the body and the world, but also of the body, in the world. (132)

Elizabeth Meese  
(sem)erotics

In Dionne Brand's four recent texts, the poems of *No Language is Neutral* (1990) and *Land to Light On* (1997), the short stories of *Sans Souci* (1989), and the novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), she attempts to articulate the subject's displacement in relation to language, place and space, and culture. Brand suggests that this articulation, however, can never be complete: language, place and space, and culture are all sites of enunciation in which the self is regulated and normalized according to dominant or 'master' discourses which can only accommodate difference (whether of gender, nationality, race, sexuality, or class) as otherness. Brand's texts attempt to rupture these dominant discourses through first exposing their desire to relegate difference to alterity, and then by reconfiguring dominant sites of enunciation in ways that can better represent the traditionally sub-altern self. Although the four works which I will examine in this thesis differ in their genres and form, they share a common thematic concern with the equilibriums between expression and experience, subjectivity and subjugation, and present and past, which characterize Brand's narrators and characters. As well, each of the four texts implies that these fluctuations in self impact upon literary representations of the (Black, female, immigrant, poor, lesbian) body by situating the corporeal as the locus of subject formation.

In one of Brand's earliest published poems, number 31 of the *Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal In Defense of Claudia* (1983), the speaker implies that the youthful female body is socially constructed according to prescribed sexual roles:



At least two poets,  
one hundred other women that I know, and I,  
can't wait to become old and haggard,  
then, we won't have to play coquette  
or butch --  
or sidle up to anything. (29)

With age and the deterioration of her body, the poetic speaker imagines a release from the gender and sexual roles inscribed on younger women's bodies. The speaker's playful critique of constructed femininity turns on notions of performativity to make its point: once the female body is no longer sexually desirable, the female interior self is liberated from the limited range of sexual performances available to her. This early poem introduces a critique of gender roles and their bodily performances that Brand develops throughout her later works.

In both her fiction and poetry, Brand frequently represents the inner lives of her characters as being regulated by the surfaces and gestures of their bodies to suggest that subjectivity is manifested in acts of corporeal signification. This correlation between the subject and its body can be usefully understood through the writings of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz, both of whom argue that the female body cannot be isolated from its social and political context which is invariably dominated by masculinist and phallogentric discourses. It is within this context, at least in the Western tradition, that the surfaces of the body have been seen to represent its interior subjectivity. For women, this has meant that their subjectivities have been primarily associated with their biological functions. Simultaneously valorized for their reproductive abilities and denigrated for this closeness to 'nature' in the dominant masculinist imagination, women's bodies have defined their cultural positions. As Sidonie Smith points out, because women's anatomical differences from men have been encoded as signifying their emotional and intellectual difference, the surfaces of women's bodies have become inscribed -- 'read' like texts -- with meanings about their interior selves: "bourgeois culture locates women in their bodies, imposes the total identification of woman with her body. A woman becomes the cultural abject,

identified in her difference, solidified in her very embodiment” (Smith 276). Smith’s terminology is particularly revealing, for identification and solidifying are the two connected processes which have inscribed women’s bodies with static, fixed, and totalizing meanings; within a phallogentric taxonomy, women’s subjectivities are classified according to the signs on the surfaces of their bodies.

Liberating women from these readings which conflate the female body with a female identity requires a re-thinking of the relationships between the body’s surface and its interior. Since the consequence of biologicistic accounts of women has been to fix and totalize their identities, one possible intervention is an un-fixing, a questioning of the very construction of a coherent body/self, and an acknowledgement of the sociopolitical constructions of bodies and subjectivities. Judith Butler’s notion of performativity accounts for how bodies are gendered and sexually regulated within sociopolitical contexts. Crucial to her formulation of gender as a series of stylized repeated acts is Butler’s distinction between expression and performance. Gender identity is not the result of the body’s ability to express or reveal its ‘true’ identity, but rather,

[i]f gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (Butler 141)

The body gendered as female is, according to Butler, the body that performs according to established social narratives and that embodies and perpetuates the production of knowledge about the differences between women and men. If an interior female subjectivity (the ‘I’) is externalized through the performances of that subject’s body, however, and these performances are fictive, then that ‘I’ is also the object of “a regulated process of repetition” (145). The ‘coquette’ and the ‘butch’ in Brand’s epigram are as performative in their subjectivity as they are in the gestures and movements of their

bodies; once these corporeal performances are thwarted by age, however, the subjectivities they inscribe can be liberated and overtaken by alternative ones.

In her novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand represents a female protagonist's desire for liberation from her body which circumscribes and defines the performances of her interior life. Verlia seeks to escape the social environment of poverty and grief which surrounds her in childhood by liberating her interior self from its body: "She knows that drawing breath is the first mistake; it limits you to feeling your finite body, that empty box with nothing but a greed for air. She'd like to live, exist or be herself in some other place, less confining, less pinned down, less tortuous, less fleshy to tell the truth" (127). Even as a child, Verlia conceives of her body as a vessel which is both the container of her 'real' self, and that which weighs down, "heavy and persistent," on any articulation of her subjectivity (127). Verlia only manages to liberate her self from its fleshy prison when she leaps over a cliff to her death. Verlia travels to the Caribbean to join the Revolution and to organize the cane cutters on the Oliviere plantation. The Revolution begins to lose its power, however, when its leader is shot dead and American troops begin to invade the island. As the Revolutionaries gather in a cemetery to hear and watch the American planes, Verlia loses her faith in the Revolution and its power to resist white imperialism: "[i]f it was so important to some white man thousands of miles away, so important that all these planes were coming for it and all these bombs were going to kill it, let them have it" (117). Rather than stay on the island and surrender to the invading troops, Verlia jumps off a cliff into the sea.<sup>1</sup> Although this act is foreshadowed throughout the novel, it is in the text's final lines that Brand represents it through Verlia's consciousness. As she falls, Verlia imagines that her psychic life transcends her corporeal existence: "Her body is cool, cool in the air. Her body has fallen away, is just a line, an electric current, the sign of lightning left after lightning, a faultless arc to the deep turquoise deep. She doesn't need air. She's in some other place already, less tortuous, less fleshy" (247). These lines that echo her childhood desire for escape from

her home reveal that Verlia's interior life is always regulated by her body, which in turn is inscribed by social laws; her only means of transcending the regulation of her subjectivity by her body is to end her corporeal existence.

Although she may fall to her death, the moments in which she is falling are ones in which Verlia's subjectivity is finally free. This fleeting transcendence of the self from its body is also implied in the title of the novel, which is taken from the final section of Brand's prose poem "No Language is Neutral":

In another place, not here, a woman might touch  
something between beauty and nowhere, back there  
and here, might pass hand over hand her own  
trembling life. (34)

The place in which Verlia senses "something between beauty and nowhere" is that of her death. Brand concludes the novel with the idea that women's liberation from their bodies is impossible in a life where their selves are inscribed on the surfaces of their bodies, that the fleshiness of existence inscribes women's subjectivities in ways that limit the realization of their whole selves. Although separation from the body is the only freedom possible to Verlia at the moment of her death, the 'other place' which the speaker of "No Language is Neutral" longs for, and which Verlia's suicide expresses a longing for, is one in which the body and self are not divided. Through her representation of Verlia, then, Brand implies that there are multiple ways in which the self's interiority can be performed, but that the body is regulated and regulates such performances; there is no 'essential self,' but there is an interior depth with an array of possible performances of its subjectivity. The assertion of one particular performance over another is regulated by the corporeal, which in turn is regulated and inscribed by the social space. Elizabeth Grosz argues that the body acts as a buffer between the subject's interior experiences and its socio-cultural experiences: "The body can be regarded as a kind of *hinge* or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body's outer surface" (33). Because

Verlia desires escape from her sociopolitical reality, both the confining environment of her childhood and the war zone she inhabits prior to her death, she must refuse this reality's inscription on her body.

While Brand reveals that the body is not entirely subject to dominant social inscription and that her characters may choose to distinguish themselves from their bodies, this defiance is often accompanied by dire consequences. The risks involved in articulating alternative performances of the self through its body, however, are frequently represented as less painful than the physical and psychical abjection which Brand's characters experience under dominant regulations. Brand's approach to the body is one that Butler envisions when she argues for a reconceptualization of the body as a cultural object and for a repositioning of the self as always in the process of its construction through signifying practices. Although Butler believes that there can be no self outside of corporeal signifying practices of gender and sexuality, she does conclude that the body's performances of its self need not always be complicit with gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality:

To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the 'I' that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. (Butler 148)

It is through this disruption of regulated repetitions that Butler sees the potential for a radical denaturalization of gender. In order for this to occur, the self must be located in discursive practices in ways that interrupt the conflation of the interior and the exterior, the subject and its body, and that fissure the normalization of bodies in a gender hierarchy.

Grosz suggests that this normalization occurs when "social law is incarnate, 'corporealized,' [and] correlatively, bodies are textualized" (35). Bodies are the localized sites of the construction and maintenance of the state and, as such, become significant

cultural objects. According to Grosz, because dominant cultural codes, norms, and ideals are incarnated in bodies which both speak and speak to each other (without necessarily talking), bodies may begin to exert a counter-inscription on their culture's fields of power and knowledge (35). The body is therefore not an entirely fixed or pliable cultural carrier. Grosz builds on Foucault's genealogy of the body's normalization under regimes of disciplinary control, supervision, and surveillance, to speculate that "If bodies are traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings, and power, they can also, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices" (Grosz 36). Like Butler, Grosz does not attempt to situate the body outside of discursive practices or social law. Instead, she advocates the female body as a site of counter-law activity, one in which knowledge is produced not in spite of sexual difference, but because of it.

Given these complex relationships between the body and society, the corporeal and the self, the problem for writers like Brand who attempt to represent the body in written discourse becomes one of how to signify that which is not a 'being' but which nonetheless exists. The question for Brand is also, conversely, how to enter into written language in ways which reveal that the body inscribes itself -- in all of its differences and variations -- on discursive practices. These ideological and aesthetic challenges emerge throughout Brand's texts in different forms, and particularly in the self-conscious declarations of the narrator of the prose poem "No Language is Neutral." The poetic narrative concludes with the speaker's exposition of her relationship to the poetic work:

I have tried to write this thing calmly  
even as its lines burn to a close. I have come to know  
something simple. Each sentence realised or  
dreamed jumps like a pulse with history and takes a  
side. What I say in any language is told in faultless  
knowledge of skin, in drunkenness and weeping,  
told as a woman without matches and tinder, not in  
words and in words and in words learned by heart,  
told in secret and not in secret, and listen, does not  
burn out or waste and is plenty and pitiless and loves. (34)

The 'I' that writes/speaks is here situated in the corporeal site of knowledge production, which is in turn connected to linguistic energy, abundance, and desire. If the words "take a side," then, they participate in dominant language which inscribes the body but which, as the final lines of this poem suggest, is beyond the limits of the corporeal. Although these connections between the body and the word make possible the speaker's representation of her work, this passage also reveals the speaker's displacement in language: the poem is told "not in / words and in words," and "in secret and not in secret." These contradictions foreground the absence and furtiveness that are necessary to a speaker who attempts to represent the self and the body in discourse, and who must consequently shift between silence and speech, absence and presence. This passage also suggests that both literary and critical imaginations must contend with the notion that there is no available language that can speak accurately the fluidity of the boundaries between bodies and subjectivities.

Whether writing about the Caribbean or Canada, Brand insists on locating her Black female narrators and characters within their social context, one in which they are invariably 'other.' Her attempts to reinsert the female body into discourse must therefore contend with how the corporeal is constantly positioned and re-positioned within multiple, and sometimes competing, cultural discourses. Sidonie Smith explains this fluctuation when she states, "we may even speculate that subjectivity is the elaborate residue of the border politics of the body since bodies locate us topographically, temporally, socioculturally as well as linguistically in a series of transcodings along multiple axes of meaning" (267). As significant as the partiality of the body in language, then, is how these representations must occur in languages which are as culturally bound and encoded as the corporeal itself.

While Western feminists tend to locate the alterity of the female body primarily in its gender, they frequently overlook the multiple subjectivities that Brand illustrates are 'read' on the Black female body. Positioned within specific racial, ethnic, national,

sexual, or class hierarchies, the Black female self becomes inscribed by what Smith identifies above as “the border politics of the body”: the Black female body is situated as other within dominant (European, phallogentric, heterosexual) discourses not as one unique body, but as belonging to a larger collective which is always already positioned as different and foreign. The surface of the Black female body becomes representative not only of its self’s interiority, but of a totalized and homogenous interior life of the collective identity to which it is read as belonging. Boyce Davies observes that “Blackness, marginalized, overdetermined and made stereotypic stands in for the human figure which is located and disrupted” (1994: 8). Boyce Davies points out, however, that Black women must negotiate this construct of Blackness with the additional identity of femaleness, the two of which cannot, and must not, be separated (1994: 8-9). These multiple and variable performances of the self complicate the positioning of the Black female body, particularly when it is one that cannot be inscribed as ‘belonging’ to a larger social space. The Black female subject that moves and migrates in space, whether by force or by choice, must therefore find a way to insert herself into languages which are not only phallogentric, but which embody the specific historical, geopolitical, and cultural domination to which Black women, and particularly their bodies, have been subjected.

Since these multiple subject positions are discursively produced, and since it is this discourse that brings the body/self into society, a revisioning of master discourses is one way to construct a new map of the Black female body. Helena Michie argues in *The Flesh Made Word* that “full representation of the body is necessarily impossible in a language that depends for meaning on absence and difference, and literal representation impossible in a language that is itself a metaphor for thought” (Michie 149). The representation of women and the female body in language thus requires that language somehow be made to accommodate both absence and presence, fragmentation and connections.



Writing about a conference of Caribbean writers in her essay collection *Bread Out of Stone* (1994), Brand comments on how these writers struggle against the Western troping of the Black female body as purely sexual by representing it as everything but sexual. She observes that Caribbean women writers are

So busy holding the front line against certain assault, so busy knowing that it would be useless to try to express this body without somebody or other taking it over, inventing it for themselves, so busy finding it uncomfortable to live in this body and so busy waiting for and knowing that the world won't change. And then again it's self-preservation. In a world where Black women's bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body as sexual is a strategy. (1994: 27)

Brand's disappointment that she must listen to her colleagues "avoid the body for itself" (1994: 29) is borne out of her belief in the need to represent Black women's bodies as the site of generosity and sensuality as well as the site of hardship and brutality. To deny the representation of Black female bodies as sexual is, to Brand, a political strategy that denies the full meaning of the selves that inhabit these bodies:

Often when we talk about the wonderful Black women in our lives, their valour, their emotional strength, their psychic endurance overwhelm our texts so much that we forget that apart from learning the elegant art of survival from them, we also learn in their gestures the fine art of sensuality, the fleshy art of pleasure and desire ... Didn't we take in their meaning? (1994: 27-28)

While she may be frustrated with her colleagues' determination to avoid literary representations of the Black female body as sensual or sexual, Brand does acknowledge that even writers may be unable to call these bodies into language, that "[o]ften we cannot find words that are not already taken up to say this" (1994: 28).

The Western trope that eroticizes Black females pervades discourse to the extent that the meanings of any pleasure or sensuality spoken by their bodies cannot be wholly articulated in language.<sup>2</sup> This European eroticization of Black female bodies creates representations which were "part of the cultural apparatus of 19th-century racism and which still shape perceptions today" (hooks 1992a: 62). During the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, the white projection of sexuality onto Black female bodies focused on individual women who were forced to serve as icons of Black sexuality within

European 'high' society. bell hooks cites the careers of Sarah Bartmann, the so-called 'Hottentot Venus' whose naked body was displayed at numerous Parisian social functions, and Josephine Baker, whose European stage performances provided spectacles of exotic difference, to argue that the Black females on display within European culture were "there to entertain guests with the naked image of Otherness" (hooks 1992a: 52-63). As well, these visual images of the Black female body rendered the women as invisible in all but their sexual parts:

Objectified in a manner similar to that of black female slaves who stood on auction blocks while owners and overseers described their important, salable parts, the black women whose naked bodies were displayed for whites at social functions had no presence. They were reduced to mere spectacle. Little is known of their lives, their motivations. Their body parts were offered as evidence to support racist notions that black people were more akin to animals than other human beings. (hooks 1992a: 62)

This configuration of the Black female body in the white imagination continues into contemporary literary and popular culture and has even, as hooks goes on to argue, been internalized by Black women and men. Brand illustrates how this early objectification of individual Black female bodies has resulted in representations of all Black women as sexual objects, even in works by non-European males, when she states that

In male writers' work like that of Jacques Roumain or Earl Lovelace or George Lamming the female body is either motherly or virgin, which amounts to the same thing -- like land to be traversed or owned. Their descriptions are idylls, paeans, imaginary, and inescapably about territory, continent ... The female is made for a man, carnally knowledgeable in the essential female body but young, hapless, inexperienced, waiting for inevitable control and ownership. (1994: 34-35)

The Black female body, even in the works of non-European writers, is described by tropes which attempt to 'naturalize' Black women as the untamed landscape or as continents waiting to be controlled by men.

Brand observes that, in reaction to these representations, Black female writers tend to inscribe the Black female body within discourses of containment and civilisation. She argues that the "burden of the body is as persistent an image in Caribbean women's literature as it is in Black women's lives," but that in both writing and material reality,

there is a “curiously ‘civilising’ discourse” that seeks to contain sexual expression (1994: 39, 48). For Brand, the Black female body is a burden in its representation because it is a burden in lived experience, and both of these realms are characterised by regulating or ‘civilising’ discourses. Ironically, Black women writers who wish to avoid the body must adopt ‘civilising’ discourse to counter notions of the Black female as savage and hypersexual: in order to subvert dominant representations of Black female sexuality, these writers enter into the very discourse in which they are misrepresented. Representations of the Black female body are thus always mediated by dominant language, whether they perpetuate the trope of Black female sexuality or they attempt to subvert it: the strategy of avoiding the body is enacted through “writing it in the most conservative terms, striving in the text for conformity to the norm of monogamous heterosexual male gratification” (Brand 1994: 27). Brand’s criticism of writers who avoid articulating Black female sexuality is, then, also a recognition that any attempt to do so within dominant language is impossible.

In her own writing, Brand attempts to dislodge the Black female body from its dominant representations as well as from ‘civilising’ discourse. The power of language and other discursive fields to contain and determine the self’s experiences of its desiring body is often exposed in Brand’s texts through her characters’ self-conscious reflections about their inabilities to enter fully into language. Whether writing in Trinidadian English or in Standard English, Brand suggests that the Black female body is always in some way irreducible to direct representation.<sup>3</sup> Her written texts which both inscribe and disrupt discursive practices become sites which represent the partiality -- both the incompleteness and the biases -- of representation itself. Instead of attempting to fully represent the body in language, then, Brand reveals the myriad ways in which she and her characters must shift between discourses, and even break through them, in order to represent the body and the self in an alternative sociosexual economy. Meira Cook summarizes this project when she writes that

Brand's writing constructs the female body as a site of performance, whether of the gaze or of the voice, the embodied/enacted textual body, the body constructed by language, the writing body as contaminated by her position in language, since there is no *outside* of power, no pure place outside the desire of the text. (91)

Although this textualized body is regulated in each of its various performances, however, regulatory discourses can neither account for nor contain performances which parody or defy the traditional conflation of the body and its interior self, or which demand that the corporeal be 're-read' as a site of both presence and absence, silence and speech. It is this kind of 're-reading' that I attempt in this thesis. Using the theoretical paradigms outlined above, I explore how Brand represents her characters in verbal, visual, and spatial sites to articulate the complex dialectics between bodies and borders, selves and others, which contribute to the formation of the subject.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In her review of *In Another Place, Not Here*, Arun Mukherjee wonders whether this island is Grenada at the time of the American invasion, and, if it is, whether Verlia's leap into the sea also alludes to the mass suicide of the last Carib Indians of Grenada when they realized that they could not resist their colonizers:

Is this yet another revisitation of Grenada after its appearance in Brand's poetry collections *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* and *No Language is Neutral* and the short-story collection *Sans Souci*? For this reader, the October 25, 1983 invasion of Grenada by 1900 US troops with the nominal help of forces from half-a-dozen Caribbean countries is the 'cataclysmic hell' (108) that leads to Verlia jumping off the cliff. It seems to me that Brand is linking Verlia's jump to her death with the defiant suicide in 1650 by forty Caribs, men, women, and children, the original inhabitants of this island, when they lost to the colonial invaders of their island. (Mukherjee 1997: 104)

Verlia's suicide may also be an echo of the mass suicides on slave ships, in which recently captured slaves jumped over the side of the ships into the sea in the belief that they would be reincarnated in Africa (Genovese 639).

<sup>2</sup> In the chapter of *Unthinking Eurocentricism* titled "Tropes of Empire," Ella Shohat and Robert Stam explain how this trope was central to European colonization by forming "part of the larger, more diffuse mechanism of naturalization: the reduction of the cultural to the biological, the tendency to associate the colonized with the vegetative and the instinctual rather than with the learned and the cultural" (138).

<sup>3</sup> This distinction between Trinidadian English and Standard English is not one between the main language and its dialect, but rather between two distinct lects. Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* is pivotal in defining the historical and cultural construction of what he terms 'nation language' in the Caribbean, a lect of which Trinidadian English is a part. Brathwaite identifies nation language as a form of English strongly influenced by African aspects of Caribbean culture which may appear to share the lexical features of English, but which, "in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree" (13).

## ***CHAPTER 2: History, Naming, and the Body***

Brand questions the sociopolitical positioning of the body in material reality according to race, gender, and sexual hierarchies at the same time as she challenges representations of the body in discourse. These two realms -- lived experience and linguistic representation - - become intertwined for Brand when she illustrates how performances of any 'true' self enacted by the body are thwarted by the impossibility of any subjectivity existing wholly outside of discourse. In this chapter, I will examine how language and history function together as discursive fields which regulate the Black female body and the performances of its subjectivity. Brand frequently emphasizes that the self cannot perform as agent if its body is inscribed in the discourse, and specifically in the constructs of language and history, in ways that suppress agency. When Brand comments that "[t]o write this body for itself feels like grappling for it, like trying to take it away from some force," however, she is referring to a complex matrix of forces and not only to the discourses constructed and perpetuated by white men (1994: 31). Although sexism and colonialism impact upon the lives of all of her characters, Brand avoids gendered or racial binaries of the dominant versus the non-dominant, those who perpetuate static representations of the body versus those who resist them. Instead, her works explore how all subjects are in some way implicated in discourses that seek to limit and fragment the self according to sociopolitical hierarchies.

While Brand does attempt to represent her subjects as discursive agents, she also represents the physical and psychical abjection in which they are implicated and which they must overcome in order to perform an alternative subjectivity. Her texts display what Carole Boyce Davies calls the "tension between articulation and aphasia, between the limitations of spoken language and the possibility of expression, between space for certain forms of talk, and lack of space for Black women's speech, the location between the public and the private" (1994:153). Brand's negotiation of these various tensions may

not always lead to their resolution, but her very search for a site that is “between the speaking and not-speaking space” positions both herself and her characters in new systems of relationality, in alternative articulations of the ways that “one is able to access, mediate or reposition oneself” (Boyce Davies 1994: 153). One’s self, Brand reveals, is fluid, and depends less for its articulation on an essential or authentic identity than it does on the tensions and movements between oppositional identities -- especially those of agent and ‘other’ -- which are enacted through the body that is either complicit with authority or resists it, or is located somewhere between complicity and resistance.

The authority which Brand suggests must be disrupted is that which has achieved and sustained its dominant position through imposing historically constructed ‘readings’ of bodily surfaces as signifiers of interior lives. In each of the passages I examine in this chapter, Brand’s characters are in varying ways positioned as inheriting these ‘readings’ manifested in the historical consciousness of New World slavery. Whether they are described as slaves or as the descendents of slaves, Brand implies that her characters cannot escape the overarching consciousness -- or master narrative -- of slavery. As well, Brand must contend with the counter narratives of New World slavery put forward by male Caribbean writers and which do not always account for the role that gender plays in narratives of this past. Susan Gingell argues that Brand’s poetic representation of the history of the Caribbean challenges Derek Walcott’s when she argues that “if Brand and Walcott agree that the rot of Empire remains though the men of Empire are gone, they part company over the issue of whether time heals the ills and injuries Empire brought to and inflicted on the Caribbean” (49). When Brand borrows the phrase “no language is neutral” from Walcott’s poem *Midsummer*, using it as the first line of the prose poem titled “no language is neutral” and as the title for the collection in which this poem appears, she inflects this phrase with an unease about language, and particularly English, that does not appear in the Walcott original.<sup>1</sup> Gingell reads Brand’s response to Walcott

as arising from her need to confront West Indian men's versions of history as much as European men's historical narratives in order to reconstitute the past:

Walcott felt he could not take sides, that he could avoid taking sides. The corollary of the recognition that 'no language is neutral' for Brand is that each speech or writing act is necessarily marked by race, gender, the historical moment of its articulation, the emotional and material conditions in which it is produced, and by the audience to which it is addressed. (Gingell 51)

Part of this confrontation is evident in Brand's re-writing of history through female characters who cannot escape the memories of their ancestors' physical torture and loss of language and selfhood, as well as slavery's enduring linguistic, socio-political, and economic legacy in the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup>

In "Bread Out of Stone," Brand describes this consciousness as pervasive and argues that, whether or not they articulate it, the 'memory' of slavery is a part of the performance of every Black Canadian self:

All Black people here have a memory, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, whether they remember it or not, and in that memory are such words as land, sea, whip, work, rape, coffer, sing, sweat, release, days ... without ... this ... pain ... coming ... We know ... have a sense ... hold a look in our eyes ... about it ... have to fight every day for our humanity ... and redeem it every day. (1994: 22-23).

Brand uses memory as a metaphor for language to argue that slavery is latent in the language Black people use. The words she lists above may have meanings that are not explicitly connected to slavery in their current usage, but they carry with them, as if in their own memory, resonances of their uses in the culture of slavery. Since language carries this residue of slavery, and Brand argues that peoples' memories are constructed in language, dominant discourses that may seem to be silent about representing the perspectives of slaves and their descendents are nevertheless full of signifiers whose meanings include repressed and latent references to slavery. One way in which Brand attempts to coax these meanings and 'memories' out of language is through writing that is "significant, honest, necessary" about the impact of slavery on Black peoples and the continuing rupture of this past into present experiences (1994: 23). As a writer who



inherits the memory of slavery, however, Brand is also in the position described by Marlene Nourbese Philip when she writes that “in the journey across the Atlantic, the African lost her culture, religion, mores and most important of all, her mother tongue. This was replaced by a ‘father tongue’, the tongue of the white male coloniser; the tongue of the patriarch, benign or ruthless” (1985: 43). While Brand and her characters can never adequately recover the mother tongues of their African ancestors, the ‘father tongue’ is equally impossible as a site of complete discursive agency.

Just as Brand must move between the ‘new’ mother tongue of nation language and the ‘father’ language of Standard Received English, so must she attempt to find a way to articulate her and her characters’ memories of slavery and attempt to enter this particular historical consciousness into the ‘universal’ narratives of history. This difficulty of entering the body inscribed by slavery into language is evident in poem IVx of *Land to Light On*, in which Brand begins a description of the evolution of the body which, once it becomes fully human, also enters into the unspeakable of human history:

here is the history of the body;  
water perhaps darkness perhaps stars  
bone then scales then wings then legs then arms  
then belly then bone then nerves then feathers then scales,  
then wings then liquid then pores then bone  
then blood pouring, then eye, then distance, only this,  
all that has happened since is too painful,  
too unimaginable. (34)

Evident in this passage is Brand’s belief that the history of the body is only partially imaginable in language; at the point when the human body develops its specific bone and blood, it also begins to bleed, witness, and move apart in space. The speaker’s list of the body’s physical development resonates with Darwinian concepts of individual and social evolution. The body that begins in water and ends with the development of bones and eyes is implied to be both the body of a fetus in its mother’s womb and the larger body of the human species: ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis so that the development and birth of each individual human body epitomizes the evolution of the species. Brand

counteracts any notion of human progress as extending beyond the species' biological development when she concludes this passage in terms that characterize social evolution as destroying biologically developed bodies. Biological Darwinism may explain how the body and the species evolve physically, but social Darwinism -- the survival of the fittest through their destruction of those determined to be weak or useless -- has brutalized and alienated human bodies. The pain experienced by the body resists representation in history, even as it is this experience which is at the onset of history. As soon as the body evolves into human form, it begins to act out the unspeakable pain of human history.

Brand reiterates this point with specific reference to Canadian history in "Islands Vanish," poem XIII of *Land to Light On*, when she constructs a national history through metaphors of writing and erasure. The narrator describes how she and two other Black people are pulled over in their car by a white police officer. Looking at the police officer's face, the narrator uses his presence and assertion of authority to recount a broader national experience. She states that there is

Something there, written as  
wilderness, wood, nickel, water, coal, rock, prairie, erased  
as Athabasca, Algonquin, Salish, Inuit ... hooded in Buxton  
fugitive, Preston Black Loyalist, railroaded to gold mountain, swimming in  
*Komagata Maru* ... Are we still moving?  
Each body submerged in its awful history. When will we arrive? (77)

Brand here conceives of dominant Canadian history as a writing of the geographical landscape disembodied from that land's peoples. The names in this poem compile a catalogue of the bodies that have been both materially and historically displaced within the construction of Canada as a nation. The first four names, "Athabasca, Algonquin, Salish, Inuit", signify four of the largest linguistic and cultural groups of Native Canadians, each of whom dominated a different part of the land before the arrival of Europeans.<sup>3</sup> Each of these groups also encompasses smaller linguistic and cultural Native groups. Brand's selection of these particular four names illustrates both the diversity of Native cultures that

existed before European contact and the fact that these cultures ranged across the entire geography of what is now Canada.

Brand then uses an ellipse to link these names and the bodies they represent to those of more recent non-white arrivals in Canada. The “Buxton fugitive” and the “Preston Black Loyalist” refer to Black American immigrants who arrived, both as fugitive slaves and as subjects loyal to Britain during the US War of Independence, in central and maritime Canada between approximately 1780 and 1860.<sup>4</sup> By using the names of the towns they settled, Buxton in Ontario and Preston in Nova Scotia, Brand emphasizes that these immigrants established communities in Canada and that they made a contribution in the country’s past that endures in the present. This particular history, however, is “hooded” in dominant accounts of Canadian history in much the same way that the Black slaves and Loyalists escaping the US had to conceal their faces and bodies to avoid detection. Whereas Brand refers to Native Canadians and Black Canadians in terms of erasure and concealment, the next reference to the experience of Chinese immigrants in the “gold mountain” of Canada hints at the duplicitousness on the part of white Canadians who encouraged their emigration from China. Brand uses “railroaded” as a verb to refer to both the Canadian recruitment of male Chinese workers to build the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and to this company’s and the government’s deception and maltreatment of these workers.<sup>5</sup> Just as the poem’s list of First Nations’ names covers all of Canada geographically, so does this list of non-dominant histories span over the centuries of Canada’s settlement.

Moving from pre-European contact to the beginning of this century, the list of names ends with another historical moment in which non-white peoples were denied a place in Canada. By ending the catalogue of names with that of the *Komagata Maru*, Brand concludes her list of the “something there” behind the dominant face of Canadian authority with something that never really was there.<sup>6</sup> This final entry in the poem’s catalogue builds on the previous names’ references to a past of erasure and deception with

another historical incident that reveals the dominant Canadian desire to expel those bodies which represent 'difference'. The nation's foundational narratives, suggests Brand, are located in the exploitation of natural resources whose inscription in history depends on the absence of non-white bodies. Although these bodies may be absent from dominant accounts of the past, however, Brand concludes the poem with the implication that the reverse is never true: the body is inevitably inscribed by its memories and experiences of the past, whether individual or cultural.

The cultural memory which informs Brand's works and which she represents in language is thus one which re-inserts bodies into dominant historical representations. This counter-writing of history, whether it takes the form of naming the bodies hidden in accounts of the past or of exposing the very processes of historical erasure, is not without its problems. In her essay on Brand, Claire Harris, and Nourbese Philip, Lynette Hunter argues that the reconstruction of history by Caribbean Canadian female writers "raises wide-ranging questions about the limits of ideology, about the possibility of regathering history, and for writers, about the extent to which their written medium and its language can be trusted to re-present the people and communities who have been written out" (Hunter 262). These are questions which Brand raises directly and alludes to throughout her works by foregrounding the body as a site of ideological, historical, and linguistic enactments of the relationship between the subject who acts in/out of the past and the subject who narrates past actions.

Brand suggests that this relationship between historical actors and history tellers is rarely a simple one: these two categories and their intersections with each other are themselves historically constructed. As Michel Trouillot explains,

In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both 'what happened' and 'that which is said to have happened.' The first meaning places the emphasis on the sociohistorical process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process. (Trouillot 2)

That the word 'history' connotes both the experience of lived events in the past and their transformation into sequences of narrated events suggests that the past, which is inaccessible through anything but its telling, is always an ideological, cultural, and linguistic construct. Hayden White explains this when he argues that "in order to qualify as historical, an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations ... unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened" (20). According to White, no single account can be said to be closer to the truth than any other. The truth of the past is always inaccessible and cannot be appealed to for verification or legitimization of any one narrative account. Without the possibility of such an appeal, the assertion of historical knowledge is always an ideologically motivated gesture, the privileging of one interpretation over another.

Brand represents this interconnectedness between social systems and historical systems in the section of "No Language is Neutral" devoted to the narrator's grandmother, Liney. Unable to access the story of Liney's life through anyone but her uncle Ben, the narrator must piece together the fragments of her grandmother's experience that appear between her uncle's narration of his past; Liney is not the subject of this history, she is "in between, as if [her] life could never see itself" (26). As she listens to her uncle's story of his past sexual exploits, the narrator must reposition her grandmother at the centre of another narrative, one which may situate the woman as its primary actor, but which is equally subject to distortion. The narrator apologizes to her grandmother for this partial representation when she states,

As if your life could never hear  
itself as still some years, god, ages, have passed  
without your autobiography now between my stories  
and the time I have to remember and the passages  
that I too take out of liking, between me and history  
we have made a patch of it, a verse still missing you  
at the subject, a chapter yellowed and moth eaten at  
the end. (26)

The teller of Liney's story may be able to articulate an alternative narrative in which her grandmother is an agent, but she can never know the full story of her life that has been lost in the histories already spoken. In this poem, Brand suggests that language is the means through which subjects enter history, but that available language is limited in its capacity to represent full subjectivity, and that history is as imbued with ideological regulation as is lived experience.

The frustration spoken by the narrator of "No Language is Neutral" is in part directed at herself: she is implicated in the erasure of her grandmother's life. While the narrator may realize that she performs in compliance with the authorizing systems of history, however, she also attempts to re-inscribe her grandmother into this system. This poem, which at the very least fixes her grandmother's name, Liney, in writing, ultimately functions as a (self-consciously) partial site of subject reconstruction. The relationship between the word and its referent, and more specifically between the body and the proper name by which it is known publicly, is emphasized repeatedly in Brand's texts as a site of subject formation. Kimberly Benston points out the pivotal role of naming within language as a whole when he argues that

Language -- that fundamental act of organizing the mind's encounter with an experienced world -- is propelled by a rhythm of naming: it is the means by which the mind takes possession of the named, at once fixing the named as irreversibly Other and representing it in crystallized isolation from all conditions of externality. (153)

Because naming figures so importantly in the larger discursive field of language, Brand uses it as a synecdoche for language as a whole. At its most literal level, naming distinguishes the body/self from others and allows for the social recognition of a subject in language. Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that naming is a practice of social bonding performed through a language game which immediately positions the speaker, the listener, and the referent in relation to each other:

there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, if only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already

positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course. (15)

The relations of the self to this story that begins with its naming, however, is inflected by the historical, cultural, and geo-political positioning of that self's body. Brand's texts illustrate how proper names take possession of a subject through regulating her bodily performances according to historically constructed gender, racial, and sexual hierarchies.

Brand's critical essay "Water More than Flour" illustrates the political urgency surrounding questions of naming. In this essay from her collection *Bread Out of Stone*, Brand writes about Patsy Jones, a twenty-one-year-old Black woman arrested "as an accomplice in the murder of a German tourist in Florida" (1994:126). Brand comments on the pervasive abjection of Black female bodies in North America that led Jones to perform her self publicly through a degrading name. Brand's description suggests that the subject's performances of her interior life through language can not avoid being complicit with the dominant regulations of the body. Imagining Jones' experiences and consciousness, Brand writes:

In the nihilism spawned in young Black people today in America, in the deep self-hatred that is their piece of the American pie, in the degradation fed to them like bread, and in her most self-annihilating moment, Patsy Jones nicknamed her young and innocent self 'Gangster Bitch', perhaps because she needed a fearsome name to beat the fearsome street that she knew was gonna get her somehow, some way, any way, and maybe she didn't know anything at all but just repeated what she'd understood as the designated ideological form of femininity for Black women on this continent because America nicknamed all of us 'gangster bitch' a long time ago, and maybe the equally nihilistic young men she hung with made her say this name as duty for their company and trophy for their self-hatred, and for all these reasons she called herself 'Gangster Bitch'. (1994:126)

The degrading naming of Black women is, according to Brand, as much a social, historical, and political process as it is a personal one. The larger forces that locate Black women as "demonic, evil, worthless and sexually degraded" (1994:127) in North American society may be the result of white supremacism, but Brand suggests that young Black women like Patsy Jones assume this identification as their identity, in a gesture more of internalized self-hatred than of ironic reversal.

Although Jones may have assumed this name herself, moreover, Brand observes that any act of self-naming by the young Black woman is immediately appropriated by dominating white culture. After listing the multiple socio-cultural reasons why Patsy Jones may have chosen her new name, Brand goes on to observe that none of these reasons are apparent when the name is used in the white-dominated media. According to Brand, the *Toronto Star* published a photograph of Patsy Jones underneath the headline 'Gangster Bitch.' She then writes,

I fear for my safety and for the safety of women like me when I see 'gangster bitch' written over a Black woman's face in the *Toronto Star*, and I fear for Patsy Jones' inner life, a life already sacrificed to that meaning, and I fear for my inner life which really can't take too much more because I've been pretending that I can write my way out of it and all the *Toronto Star* had to do to shake me was write 'gangster bitch' over a Black woman's face to bring me to my knees. (1994: 127)

Brand's narrative of Patsy Jones exemplifies the ideological struggle embedded in the act of naming by first showing how Jones assumes a name that performs the cultural subjugation of young Black women, and then by revealing that this name is re-inscribed by the dominant social power. Continuing this essay with the description of another form of racial hatred, the Toronto police's humiliating public strip-search of a Black Jamaican woman, Audrey Smith, Brand suggests that these examples are all variations of a similar experience: the degradation of Black women because of the gender and the race 'written' on their bodies. This in turn causes Brand to "fear for [her own] Black woman's body" (1994:126). As her name begins to stand in for the historically and geopolitically constructed 'readings' of her body, Patsy Jones begins to internalize these surface inscriptions as the only available performances of her interior self. The Black female self may consequently be overwhelmed by social inscriptions of her body, and may be unable to perform her subjectivity in any manner except that which is inscribed on her surface by dominant regulatory practices.

Performances of the body that resist this self-identification are not completely impossible, however, for the process of internalizing hegemonic inscriptions of the body



does not create an essentially subjugated interior life, but rather constructs *enactments* of that interiority that are subjugated. The possibility of asserting a self as agent through reinscribing the body in language may be inconceivable when what Foucault calls the “political technologies of the body” (1979: 30) are nearly total, but these technologies only require administration and repetition because there is the possibility that the body/self may deviate from them. Brand’s fiction plays out this possibility, as well as its limitations, when she focuses on how the Black female self may struggle against the naming of her body through renaming, unname, and namelessness to convey her interior subjectivity. As Brand’s narrative of Patsy Jones indicates, however, such articulations of subjectivity may be provoked and anticipated by, or even incorporated into, the dominant system.

If names are the means through which the self’s course is socio-politically charted and its body identified, then refusing to speak one’s own name and (because naming is a synecdoche for language as a whole) denying the relationship between spoken language and its referent are possible ways to move or be moved outside of regulations of the subject. It is this positioning of the self in relation to language that Brand represents in the short story “Sans Souci.” Using the protagonist’s name as a synecdoche of all systems which desire her identification and subjugation, Brand reveals how the power to speak a name and, more generally, to endow sounds with meaning, is an agency frequently denied the abject Black female body. The story begins with the narrator’s description of a nameless protagonist and her struggle to stop the rough grass growing around her house from overwhelming her. The narrator defers naming the woman herself, waiting until the character of the man arrives to speak the protagonist’s name: “a man would come often, but it was difficult to know him. When she saw him coming, she would never know him, until he said her name. *Claudine*. Then she would remember him, vaguely. A bee near her ear. Her hand brushing it away” (2). Her recognition of the man does not rely on recognizing his name, but rather on his speaking her name;

rather than identifying him in language in order to make him familiar, the reverse occurs. It is only when he speaks her name and vocalizes his familiarity with her that the protagonist knows who the man is. Thus positioned as being named rather than naming others, Claudine seems to be as overwhelmed by the people in her life as she is by the evergrowing grass and bush around her house. Claudine's physical isolation and seeming disorientation are also apparent when the narrator again positions her as the object found by others, this time her children:

Her children knew where she was. They would come up the hill when they did not see her or go to their grandmother's. She never woke up suddenly here, even when the three of them screamed her name. *Claudine!* The boy, with his glum face turning cloudier, and the girl and the little boy, looking hungry. (3)

From this description of the woman's subjection to others in the story's present, the narrator moves back in time through Claudine's consciousness to reveal how those who name her also violate her physically.

The narrator describes how Claudine's body is made abject first when she is raped by the man and then when she gives birth to his children. The man's sexual violence relies on his ability to stop Claudine from speaking, as "[h]e had grabbed her and forced her into his little room and covered her mouth so that his mother would not hear her screaming" (12). The silence that is required by his physical brutality extends beyond the moment of the rape: the man tells Claudine not to tell anyone, and although she ran home "crying that she would tell her mother ... she knew she could tell no one" (12). When she does speak and accuse the man of raping and impregnating her, however, Claudine is once again denied her selfhood. The community that finally hears her accusations perpetuates the annihilation of her subjectivity that the man inscribed on her body by positioning her as his object:

From then, everyone explained the rape by saying that she was his woman. They did not even say it. They did not have to. Only they made her feel as if she was carrying his body around. In their looking at her and their smiles which moved to one side of the cheek and with their eyelids, uncommonly demure or round and wide and gazing. She came into the

gaze of all of them, no longer a child -- much less a child who had been raped. Now, a man's body. (13)

Although they do not articulate Claudine's imposed identity in language, the community speaks her repositioning in their physical gestures, in the ways that their bodies relate to hers. It is through this social betrayal that Brand suggests the "abject female body is not only a personal body ... [i]t is the community's body, one that threatens to contaminate the body politic" (Smith 285). In order to minimize Claudine's contamination of the Sans Souci community with her violated body, her neighbours regulate the agency of her self and position her body as owned by the man.<sup>7</sup>

The children who speak Claudine's name are equally described as violating her body and her self. The narrator describes how her most recent pregnancy overtook Claudine's body and how she reacts to this psychically with the desire to expel and deny the baby:

The new child, the fourth, moved in her like the first. It felt green and angry. Her flesh all around it, forced to hang there protecting this green and angry thing. It reached into her throat, sending up bubbles and making her dizzy all the time. It was not that she hated it; she only wanted to be without it. Out, out, out, out, never to have happened. She wanted to be before it, to never know or have known about it. (7)

Claudine's reaction to her pregnancy and her subsequent neglect of all of her children reveals that as her body resists the dominant inscription of maternal femininity, her subjectivity becomes that of the maternally abject. Having had her body and self violated by her children's father, Claudine seeks to reassert an agent self that can only be achieved by reestablishing the boundaries of her body. This representation has much in common with Julia Kristeva's formulation of the abject as that which is expelled from the body and rendered as 'other.'<sup>8</sup> Butler reads Kristeva's construction of the abject as distinguishing between the 'me' and the 'not-me' as also defining the boundaries of the body, and consequently of the self. Butler writes that "the boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness" (Butler

133). While Butler uses Kristeva's formulation to explain the mechanics of how the body politic ejects and defiles its 'others', and this is the very process which Claudine's community enacts, abjection also functions in this story on an individual level: Claudine needs to expel her child from her womb in order to render what is part of her body and identity a separate and other self.

Claudine seeks to establish the boundaries of her identity as distinct from those who violate her body. It is also those characters who force her body to perform as abject who attempt to establish a social bond with the woman by speaking her name, and in so doing transpose their possession of her body into language. The absence of names for either the man or the children suggests that Claudine refuses to relate to them linguistically and socially. This position as the spoken body/self rather than the subject who speaks is reinforced in the final passage of the story, in which Claudine's attempt to speak during her first childbirth is thwarted by the grass and bush which she fights to keep at bay. The narrator states that when she was raped by the man, Claudine's voice was supplanted by her efforts to breathe. Her body's entry into language is curtailed by the violence being inflicted on it: "Her breathing took up all the time and she wanted to scream, not breathe - more screaming than breathing" (14). During the rape, Claudine is physically prevented from articulating its violence, while during the birth of the child that is its product her voice is thwarted by the ever-encroaching environment. The narrator explains that,

Much as she tried, her screaming did not get past the bush and the trees; even though she tried to force it through the blades of grass and the coarse vines. Upon every movement of the bush, her thin and piercing voice grabbed for the light between. But the grass would move the other way, making the notes which got through dissonant and unconnected, not like the sound of a killing. (14)

Claudine's abjection is thus total: the man and the children defile her body and own her in language; her community refuses to listen to her accusations and position her as their defiled 'other'; and the natural environment around her house finally overwhelms her attempts at articulating the experiences of her body. Her linguistic displacement, which is

a symptom of her bodily and interior fragmentation, positions Claudine as the named rather than the namer, the inscribed addressee rather than the inscribing speaker. This performance outside of dominant regulations, in which she is corporeally, spatially, and psychically 'other' to the body politic, moves Claudine outside of dominant inscriptions at the same time that this deviation is immediately incorporated back into social law.

Claudine's attempt to speak a self that objects to the violent regulation of her body positions her as the defiled 'other' that is both expelled from the body politic and which that social system needs in order to assert its own cohesion and agency.

Claudine's verbal incoherence or forced silence consequently has as much meaning for her subjectivity and for her community as do the meaningful words spoken around her. Writing of the linguistic loss experienced by African slaves transported to the Caribbean, Marlene Nourbese Philip notes that "it is perhaps ironic that the descendents of a society where the word and the act of naming was the focal point, the fulcrum of societal forces, should find themselves in a situation where the word, *their* word, was denied them" (1990: 277). Although their language and names were denied them, Brand frequently suggests that silence was also imbued with meaning by slaves and their descendents. Just as Brand must negotiate languages and silences which each 'take a side', naming, an act which represents the endowment of words with meaning, becomes a practice which her characters must negotiate in order to find a language in which they can express themselves. Whereas Claudine was named and never heard, Brand suggests that another mechanism to resist master names (and narratives) is to actively unname the self, its others, and its environment. Kimberly Benston examines unname in its earliest Greek and Hebraic representations to argue that "in its earliest manifestations the act of unname is a means of passing from one mode of representation to another, of breaking the rhetoric and 'plot' of influence, of distinguishing the self from all else -- including Eros, nature and community" (153). This rupture is evident in *In Another Place, Not*

*Here*, in which Brand suggests that unnamng is a strategy for interrupting the body's relationship to its culture and to the social laws which regulate the self.

At the beginning of the novel, Elizete's description of her surrogate mother revolves around this woman's refusal to locate her environment within language, a form of resistance handed down to her by her matrilineal ancestors. As a child, Elizete familiarizes herself with the trees and plants around the woman's house. While her knowledge of her natural environment is pre-linguistic, Elizete nonetheless ascribes her environment with meaning and a usefulness to her life: "First I pull weed, then I dig dasheen, then I learn all the plants there and on the hillside though I don't know their names. But I know which grass bitter and which one good for fever" (17). The knowledge Elizete acquires for herself, whether the medicinal utility of one plant or the bad taste of another, and her storage of this knowledge in memory, occurs without calling the objects into language. Elizete may not know the names of things, but she "know their face"; she also knows that they do in fact have names in language, but that she "can not be sure of the truth of" these names (19). Elizete instinctively knows that the sign may not be an accurate representation of the referent, that knowing her environment can occur without possessing it in the word, and that her physical experiences of the plants offer greater familiarity with them than would any spoken name. Elizete hears the story of her surrogate mother's ancestor, who arrived at their present house "grieving bad for where she come from" (18). Elizete recounts how when Adela was forcibly removed from her home and brought as a slave to work on a plantation estate, this 'original' inhabitant of their house

done calculate the heart of this place, that it could not yield to her grief, she decide that this place was not nowhere and is so she call it. Nowhere. She say nothing here have no name. She never name none of her children, nor the man she had was to sleep with and she never answer to the name that they give she which was Adela. (18)

Realizing that her new location and circumstances will never afford her autonomy, Adela gives the place a non-name, a word which simultaneously inscribes and effaces the

meaning of its referent to create a non-place.<sup>9</sup> Adela's re-naming of the plantation as this non-place inhibits the development of 'normal' social relations within it. Since she lives in Nowhere, Adela publicly conceives of herself, and those around her, as no-bodies; she never acknowledges the name she is given by her master, and she denies linguistic knowledge of her imposed family by never speaking their names.

Adela uses silence as a means of resistance by refusing to submit her self and her descendants to linguistic domination. As Elizete explains, however, she also uses obeah magic as a means to rid herself of the master's violence. This sorcery is the only occasion on which it seems Adela speaks a name, that of her master/victim. Elizete describes how, returning from her labour in the cocoa fields of the plantation, Adela would

make sure and pass by the big house and she draw a circle in the ground and sprinkle one stone in it that was her eye and spit the man name, with blood from biting she mouth, into the centre. Rain or sun she do it for three years. And finally one day he drop dead on that very spot. They say she could work good obeah but she say is not obeah what kill him, is his own wicked mind what make him die in his wicked name. (18)

Her obeah magic gives Adela power over her master through his name and is the linguistic means through which she can harm his body/self. Although she may have denied the effectiveness of her obeah powers, the slave master nonetheless died within the spatial representation of his name created by Adela. When Adela speaks her master's name as part of her obeah ritual, she uses it as the magical link between her master and death to create a physical place where he will die, as Elizete puts it, "in his wicked name". Adela's ritualistic cursing of her master's name, her use of African-based beliefs to relieve her New World suffering, is a particularly powerful reminder that the meanings of names, and of language in general, shifts depending on the speaker and the context. The master's name that may otherwise merely signify his surface identity, his individual difference from other white men, begins to signify his interior being, the wicked self contained in the master's body. Adela's silence surrounding her imposed name and her refusal to ascribe to the space she occupies and the children she bears any kind of

linguistic label thus suggests that she fears signifying her own, and her children's, interior consciousnesses as slaves. Unlike Patsy Jones, Adela will not participate in the annihilation of the Black female subject that Brand fears occurs in their self-identification with dominant names.

By refusing to name her children or her sexual partner, or to assume the master's name for herself, Adela attempts to sever her self from her personal history as well as from the historically constructed space in which her body is positioned. Her refusal to name her children, moreover, is a refusal to enter into regulated maternity that Adela also acts out corporeally. Elizete describes her ancestor as having "mothered not a one" of her eight children because she saw "their face as bad luck and grudge them the milk from her breast. She eat paw-paw seed until it make them sick in she womb" (19). Adela refused to breast-feed and used obeah charms on her children which were "left half done in them so, till all of she generations have a way so that nothing is right with them neither" (19). Adela's refusal to perform as a maternal body parallels her refusal to inscribe her children's body in language, both of which are forms of resistance to regulated performances of the Black female self under slavery. Makeda Silvera explains the complex regulations of race, gender and sexuality during the era of Caribbean slave plantations:

Under slavery, production and reproduction were inextricably linked. Reproduction served not only to increase the labour force of slave owners but also, by 'domesticating' the enslaved, facilitated the process of social control. Simultaneously, the enslaved responded to dehumanized conditions by focussing on those aspects of life in which they could express their own desires. Sex was an area in which to articulate one's humanity but, because it was tied to attempts 'to define oneself as human,' gender roles, as well as the act of sex, became badges of status. To be male was to be the stud, the procreator; to be female was to be fecund and one's femininity was measured by the ability to attract and hold a man, and to bear children. In this way, slavery and the post-emancipated colonial order defined the structures of patriarchy and heterosexuality as necessary for social mobility and acceptance. (1988: 41)



Under this system, then, Adela is regulated as female through sexual violence and her subsequent fecundity, but it is a femininity which she attempts to erase through corporeal and linguistic denial.

Elizete imagines that Adela “had to make her mind empty to conceive” her new location because her true home “must have been full and living and take every corner in she mind so when she reach [Nowhere], there was no more room for here” (20). Elizete concludes that Adela refuses to name her new location in language because her language is consumed by the names of her home, that the names of her subjugation require a conceptual space in Adela’s mind that is already consumed by the fullness of her prior, autonomous life. This connection between names and place appears again when Elizete speculates that Adela’s linguistic annihilation is related to the terror of her journey over the Middle Passage. After living as a slave and dying in Nowhere, spending so much of her energy on refusing names, Adela forgets her “true true name and she tongue” (20). Memory and forgetting are finally formed around names, which themselves are formed around experiences. Elizete describes how when she is first captured and relocated, Adela actively remembered her experiences, and that she would “take an opportunity to remember all the things that she was going to forget” (21). When she reaches her final destination, however, Adela stops remembering, “[a]ll her maps fade from she head,” and she does not stop this willful forgetting until it is too late, until “she true name slipping away” (22). And it is once she loses her true name that Adela’s body dies, that her “heart just shut” because she no longer has any ties to her home. The loss of her true name means that she is fully “here” in the silence and wickedness of Nowhere (22).

According to Elizete, Adela believed that in death she would travel home and finally leave Nowhere. From this safer place, she would then ‘send’ the names of things that she had taken away from them to her descendents. Elizete ponders what these names would be, and in so doing begins to name her environment for herself, associating the plants with their function and meaning to her own life:

I watch things and I wonder what Adela would call this if it wasn't nowhere, pull and throw bush, make haste weed, jump up and kiss me flowers, waste of time plant, red berry poison, beach tree poison, draw blood leaf, stinging leaf bush, Jack Spaniard tree, wait in the road come home night time bird. I make up these names for Adela things. (20)

Elizete hopes that by making her environment familiar in her own language and consciousness, she can transform Nowhere from an empty place to a full one, that "the names of things would make this place beautiful" (23). Grieving for Adela's loss, Elizete states: "I say to myself that if I say these names for Adela it might bring back she memory of herself and she true name. And perhaps I also would not feel lonely for something I don't remember" (24). Elizete's nostalgia is for something she has never known, but which she imagines in the absence and silence passed on to her generation by her ancestor. Adela's forced relocation from a place of fullness and autonomy to a nowhere of subjugation is, then, marked by an unnamings, first of the world of the plantation and then, tragically, of herself. The resistance to her master which she asserts through her silence and her obeah magic eventually becomes an internalized resistance, the annihilation of what she is forced to become, and a forgetting that her body was once the incarnation of a subjectivity. The eventual effect of Adela's unnamings on her self reflects bell hooks' observation that "without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure" (1992: 2). Adela's refusal to assume the master's language eventually leads to the forgetting of her own language; her resistance to expressing her pain limits the potential to express her pleasure.

Adela's place in Elizete's understanding of history is one between the creation and the effacement of the past, between the subject who acts and the subject who inscribes those actions in language. Because she denies her present place and the social relations that occur within it, Adela's present becomes a past for subsequent generations that is knowable only through her active erasure. Although Adela herself is not erased from Elizete's history, she wills her subjectivity to be remembered as a partial one that relies on

the absences between words and on the inscription of her body in systems that regulate the performance of her self. If, as Trouillot argues, “[s]ilences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing” (49), then Adela’s actions in the past double the silencing effect of historical narratives. Like Patsy Jones, Claudine, and the narrator of “No Language is Neutral,” Adela performs her self in a way that is complicit with the dominant systems that seek to subjugate the Black female body, and which enter this body into history as a self which lacks whole discursive agency. It is this ambivalent position, in which the characters disrupt the European narrative and enter into it, that situates them as anti-bodies to dominant accounts of the past, as subjects who penetrate the historical system in attempts to render it less deleterious and painful. In order to construct even the partial representation that inserts a subaltern self into dominant history, therefore, that interior self must be willing to perform its body in ways complicit with dominant regulations. The narrator of “No Language is Neutral” reinforces this point when she observes that

History will only hear you if you give birth to a woman who smooths starched linen in the wardrobe drawer, trembles when she walks and who gives birth to another woman who cries near a river and vanishes and who gives birth to a woman who is a poet, and, even then. (26)

To enter into history, the subject must comply with the historically constructed regulations of her body and her self, and must even relinquish her own historical agency in the hopes that it will be remembered by her descendents.

Butler argues that the agency to perform alternative subjectivities can only ever be achieved within the established practices of repetitive signifying. She states that “[t]here is no self that is prior to the convergence [of discursive injunctions] or who maintains ‘integrity’ prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (145). According to Butler, signification makes agency possible through the inevitable

failures, incoherent configurations, and even subversions of injunctions to perform in complicity with specific ideologies. The agency of the subject, then, is only possible when the self can find new ways to signify its body. The inability of Brand's characters to assert whole agency or to become fully represented in language and history is an abjection which is symptomatic of the larger problem that their bodies are inscribed and 'read' as signifiers of their selves. In order to rupture these repeated significations and re-inscribe the body through alternative performances, Brand suggests that the self must break with its corporeal enactments. In the middle of poem IVx of *Land to Light On*, Brand revisits the history of the body with which the poem began:

here again the history of the body  
men romance the shape they're in  
the mythologies they attach to it  
their misunderstandings  
and this is what James should have said to Trotsky  
as they drank in Mexico City,  
what might have happened if one had said to the other,  
comrade, this is the time you betray the body. (36)

The history of the body that she initially described as one of unspeakable pain and displacement is also the history of how the body (and here it is the male body) is endowed with constructed meanings. The narrator imagines a different course of history in the final lines of this verse when she speculates about the revolutionary effects of displacing these meanings, of the male self betraying the romanticization and mythologies built up around his body.<sup>10</sup> The narrator then identifies these constructions of the male body as being

what was wrong in the first place,  
how the intangible took over  
the things left in a language with carelessness or purpose,  
men's arms and legs and belly, their discreet assignments  
and regulations (36)

The residue of significations around the corporeal permeate language. Weaving together allusions to formal political struggle with reflections on the body's position in language, this poem argues for the revolutionary act of overthrowing the linguistic and historical

laws that govern the body. It is only when the self actively betrays its inscribed body that history, both the events in the past and their discursive representation, can be transformed. While men may have the power to subvert the authority invested in their bodies, however, Brand's female characters seldom share this autonomy. If the re-writing and enactment of dominant history can occur through the *renunciation* of mythologies about the male body, then the parallel process for the female body is an *enunciation* of its alternative mythologies, a new performance which would 'betray the body' as it has been constructed by the word.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brand quotes from section LII of Walcott's *Midsummer*:

Have we changed sides  
to the mustached sergeants and the horsy gentry  
because we serve English, like a two-headed sentry  
guarding its borders? No language is neutral;  
the green oak of English is a murmurous cathedral  
where some took umbrage, some peace, but every shade,  
all, helped widen its shadow.

When Brand repeats the phrase “no language is neutral” in the context of her own poetry, she seems less willing than Walcott to approach English in these terms of security and protection, less sure that some may find “peace” in it, and far more inclined to take “umbrage” with a language that she often argues dominates subjects entry into discourse to the extent that they cannot “widen its shadow.”

<sup>2</sup> While the majority of Brand's texts are set geographically in the Caribbean, those situated in Canada also suggest that New World slavery is significant to the formation of cultural and personal subjectivities. This intersection between historical knowledge, cultural consciousness, and geographic space and place is further discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Miller explains that the Athabascans dwelled predominantly in the areas North and West of the plains, the Algonquins inhabited the plains areas of what is now known as central Canada, the Salish people lived in the Northern woodlands of the West Coast, and the Inuit lived across the vast Arctic and sub-Arctic areas of Canada (Miller 1989).

<sup>4</sup> See James Walker's *The Black Loyalists* for a history of early Black immigration and settlement in Canada. In her article, “Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65”, Peggy Bristow explains that

Black families, through their hard work and dedication, built the Elgin Settlement in Buxton. Most came from the United States. Indeed, most Black people who settled in Canada came from the United States, and by 1850, when the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law making it legal to capture Black people and return them to slavery, many Black people saw Canada as the promised land. (74)

Bristow concludes, however, that, the U.S. Fugitive Slave Law “did not mean that provincial residents [of Upper Canada] were single-mindedly in favour of an antislavery society,” and that many members of the Buxton community dedicated themselves to antislavery work and to the struggle against racism in Canada (124-126).

<sup>5</sup> In *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World*, Anthony Chan describes the poor working conditions on the railroad and the CPR's refusal to fund the men's travel back to China, as they had been promised. As well, the government implemented ‘head taxes’ on all new Chinese immigrants in 1886 (just after the CPR was completed)

which effectively stopped the male workers from sponsoring their wives' and families' emigration to Canada.

<sup>6</sup> In 1907 the Canadian government (responding to anti-Asian riots) imposed two conditions on Asians entering Canada: they had to be in possession of \$200 and they had to have taken a direct route to Canada from their country of origin. Both of these requirements were designed to prohibit, if not completely halt, Asian immigrants from entering Canada. In response, a Punjabi man named Gurdit Singh chartered the Japanese steamer the *Komagata Maru* to transport 376 Punjabi Sikh immigrants (all of whom had the required \$200) to Vancouver. When they arrived in Vancouver in 1914, government officials declared that the ship had not taken a direct route and the ship was forcibly sent back (Judge 1-49).

<sup>7</sup> Brand's use of Sans Souci as the name of Claudine's community has both literary and historical resonances. This name appears in V.S. Naipaul's novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969), when Mr. Biswas and his family are taken on a day-trip to Sans Souci by his supervisor in the Trinidadian civil service, Miss Logie. Miss Logie has rented a house in Sans Souci and offers to lend Mr. Biswas her car for the trip. This holiday marks Mr. Biswas' rising social status, as he had never before been able to afford a holiday away from home, and it distinguishes him from the other members of his family (Naipaul 498-507). The Sans Souci in this novel is consequently the one experienced by Indo-Caribbeans through the charity of a Euro-Caribbean, and, in part because of these ethnic, racial, and class differences between Naipaul's characters and Brand's, it is a site characterized more by temporary pleasure than by ongoing pain.

Michel Trouillot dedicates a chapter of his historiographical work *Silencing the Past* to how the name Sans Souci has entered Western history, but he overlooks its appearance in Trinidad. Trouillot's main argument is that the name Sans Souci refers to three different historical narratives: the now ruined palace called Sans Souci in Haiti that was "built in the early nineteenth century, for a black king, by blacks barely out of slavery" (Trouillot 33); the man, Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci, who was probably a slave from the Congo and who was an important resistance fighter in the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 (Trouillot 37-44); and, another palace (still standing) called Sans Souci in Potsdam, which is a site of events in German history that extend through time from Frederick to Hitler to Chancellor Kohl (Trouillot 45). Trouillot uses these three instances of the name Sans Souci and the connections between them as an example of how history, like lived experience, is characterised by inequities that silence some stories in favour of others.

Whether Brand's use of the name Sans Souci is a direct allusion to Naipaul's and Trouillot's narratives or merely to the actual place Sans Souci in Trinidad, it is nonetheless a name that refers to a place inscribed by the historical events of slavery and the lingering racial, ethnic, and class-based inequities which are its effect in Trinidad and elsewhere. Also, Brand uses the name ironically as 'sans souci' means 'without care,' whereas Claudine is 'without everything.'

<sup>8</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> In his discussion of 'supermodern' late capitalist non-places, such as airports and highways, Marc Auge argues for the distinction between the places of social life and non-places which impede the development of organic social life. He writes that "[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space

which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77-78). This distinction applies to Adela's naming of her space, as the non-place of the plantation denies her the social relations, memories of her past, and whole identity which Auge believes exist in place.

<sup>10</sup> Brand is presumably alluding here to the conversation between C.L.R. James and Trotsky recorded in James' *At the Rendezvous of Victory* under the title "Discussions with Trotsky" (1939). The conversation that the speaker of Brand's poem wishes had taken place between C.L.R. James and Trotsky is one that is both far more succinct and radical than the actual conversation that is recorded to have taken place between the two men. The primary reason for James' meeting with Trotsky was to discuss his proposal for the Fourth International to consider organizing and supporting a 'Negro Organization' in the United States that would address the concerns of Black Americans and support their self-determination under the auspices of an international socialist revolution. Trotsky was supportive of James' proposal and believed that the Fourth International should act quickly to recruit, educate, and eventually liberate, Black Americans:

We should take the initiative. I believe it is necessary. This supposes the adaptation of our transitional programme to the Negro problems in the States -- a very carefully elaborated programme with genuine civil rights, political rights, cultural interests, economic interests, and so on. It should be done. (James 42)

The remainder of the conversation, however, is occupied with the procedural work required to organize Black Americans and seems far more bureaucratic and officious than the revolutionary anti-racist rhetoric with which the conversation begins. As well, it is apparent that both James and Trotsky conceive of the 'Negro worker' and Black American revolutionaries as male and that they subordinate questions of gender to those of class and race. The speaker's imaginary alternative conversation between James and Trotsky is consequently one that would require both men to abandon their programmatic approach to revolution and to betray the masculinism on which it is founded.



### **CHAPTER 3: *The Dialectics of Sight***

In her essay "Seeing" Brand draws on her experience making documentary films to comment on the importance of visual perception to the construction of identity:

The eye is a curious thing: it is not passive, not merely a piece of physiology, practical and utilitarian; it is not just a hunk of living matter, gristle, tendon, blood. It sees. It has more skill than the foot or hand. When it takes an image in, this act appears to me not simple. The eye has experience, knowledge and has cut out territories, reasons why it sees this subject leaning in and that one leaning away ... The eye has a citizenship and possessions. (1994: 169)

Brand's dual identity as a writer and filmmaker allows her to understand how the cinematic eye perceives, frames, and even captures the filmic subject.<sup>1</sup> She does not, however, deny the filmic subject agency. Concluding the above passage with the statement that "[y]ou cannot leave this eye alone for a second, at least not if it's resting on you", Brand implies that the eye that sees is also seen (1994:171). As a documentary filmmaker, Brand subverts the traditional relationship between the viewed object and the seeing subject. In her 1994 film *Long Time Comin'*, a study of artist-activists Faith Nolan and Grace Channer, Brand places herself in the role of director before the camera and in conversation with her documentary subjects. This self-conscious approach to visual representation is reminiscent of Brand's approach to written language, resisting the ways it traditionally obscures its construction and framing of the Black female body. Brand does not remain purely in the role of the eye that sees when making her films. Similarly, her narrators who describe looking, whether at images of other women or of themselves, are implicated in the process of their visual and verbal actions. Rather than situating themselves as the active, inscribing subjects of their visual and verbal objects, Brand's narrators are frequently in the position of gazing at another agent, one who cannot be contained by either the narrators' sight or by their words. The relationships between the female characters who see and those who are seen become dialectical: their representation in Brand's works is characterized more by the seeing self's interrogation of her own identity than by the power of her gaze to fix the other's identity.<sup>2</sup>

Brand's concern with the relationships between women who see other women's bodies and inscribe them in language is evident in the poems of *No Language is Neutral*. In this collection, Brand explores the relationship between visual perception and verbal representation through narrators who struggle to find the linguistic means to represent visions of their ancestors, whether they are actual relatives or older unrelated Black women whose presence assumes the significance of an ancestor. In poem X of the cycle "hard against the soul," Brand emphasizes the role of the visual in verbal representations when the speaker describes reading in scopic terms:

I saw this woman once in another poem, sitting,  
throwing water over her head on the rind of a country  
beach as she turned toward her century. Seeing her  
no part of me was comfortable with itself. I envied her,  
so old and set aside, a certain habit washed from her eyes. (47)

The poetic speaker envies this old woman because she sees her as being free of social constraints and gendered norms:

In my nerves something there  
unravelling, and she was a place to go, believe me,  
against gales of masculinity but in that then, she was  
masculine, old woman, old bird squinting at the  
water's wing above her head, swearing under her  
breath. (47)

The speaker's verbal description of this visual image represents the old woman's age as both isolating her from the social and allowing her to perform a freedom traditionally associated with the masculine. Although the speaker may fix this woman first with her gaze and then with her language, however, she also implies that the old woman experiences her body 'for itself' and with a solitary pleasure that the speaker can never fully know or describe. The speaker's gaze is returned by the old woman with an intensity that dislodges the binary between seeing subject and viewed object:

Old woman, that was the fragment that I caught in  
your eye, that was the look I fell in love with, the piece  
of you that you kept, the piece of you left, the lesbian,  
the inviolable, sitting on a beach in a time that did not  
hear your name or else it would have thrown you into

the sea, or you, hear that name yourself and walked  
willingly into the muting blue. Instead you sat and I  
saw your look and pursued one eye until it came to  
the end of itself and then I saw the other,  
the blazing fragment. (50)

The speaker imagines that the look she sees in the woman's eye is the fragment of the woman's self that she has retained for itself, the piece of the woman that she performs as lesbian in that it defies gendered and sexual hierarchies which position women in relation to men and which deny women the pleasure of sexually experiencing their bodies for themselves. The speaker who sees this woman does not only see her body, however, for her eye meets the old woman's eye and recognizes in it the "blazing fragment" of a self performing in defiance of social regulations.

Brand frames this verbal description of a visual image within the speaker's confessions about her first lesbian experience to situate the relationship between the viewing speaker and her viewed object within the context of female longing for an other whose image mirrors the self. Rather than representing the speaker's gaze as dominating or distancing its object, the act of looking becomes one of longing for the agency and freedom displayed by the viewed object. The above passages are framed by the speaker's descriptions of how she has felt "the unordinary romance of women who love women for the first time" (46). The poem begins and concludes with the speaker's desire for her first female lover, a desire for another female body which also allows the speaker to perform her own body as a site of pleasure. The speaker addresses her lover to state that:

You ripped the  
world raw. It was as if another life exploded in my  
face, brightening, so easily the brow of a wing  
touching the surf, so easily I saw my own body, that  
is, my eyes followed me to myself, touched myself  
as a place, another life, terra. They say this place  
does not exist, then, my tongue is mythic. (51)

The speaker here repeats the imagery of a bird and surf with which she describes the old woman to metaphorically explain the ease and freedom she feels in her desire for her lover. Like the old woman, the speaker defies "they" who deny women the pleasure of

their own and other women's bodies. Brand's description of this pleasure implies each of the meanings of the word 'ecstasy': the speaker experiences ecstasy in its etymological sense of 'to stand outside one's self,' as well as in its sense of exalted joy and rapture. It is both of these forms of ecstasy that are said not to exist and that the speaker's tongue recreates. The speaker's tongue represents her poetic voice through which she constructs her self as it stands outside of its body, and this image of a 'tongue' producing ecstasy implies the sexual enactment of desire. The speaker consequently suggests that her desire allows her to verbally represent how she sees her body through her own gaze. Because such desire and self-gazing are deemed non-existent, however, the speaker concludes that her verbal description is "mythic". The ambiguity of this word, the double sense of "mythic" as meaning both that which is fabricated and that which is legendary or super-human, positions the speaker in opposition to the claims to realism of dominant discourses that cannot accommodate the female gaze which positions other women's bodies or its own as sites of agency and pleasure.

Through her very enunciation of this dilemma, however, the speaker manages to force dominant language so that it can, at least partially, inscribe the female body performing in visual space as it is seen by a female self. In her analysis of this poem, Meira Cook argues that "[t]he effect of the gaze here is problematized by the subject's refusal to participate in her own confinement in language whilst simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of knowing the body other than textually" (90). Just as the speaker sees the body of the old woman "in another poem" and then reinscribes this body in her own poem, so does she textually inscribe the desire and gaze which circulate around her own and her lover's bodies. While the speaker may experience women's bodies visually, she chooses verbal language to represent these sights and to express the dialectical relationship between the glances of the women. This dialectic, which Cook argues is "an exchange of mirrors" (90), is explicit in the speaker's observation that, having recognized her lesbian desire, "I have become myself. A woman who looks / at a

woman and says, here, I have found you, / in this" (51). The woman who speaks in this poem performs as both the gazer and the gazed upon, as both the self who looks and speaks and as the body that is seen by other women. The speaker's fluctuation between these two visual positions challenges dominant discourses which seek to limit desire and expression to only one mode.

Although the visual images in "hard against the soul" are of living women and are not formalized representations such as paintings or photographs, Brand's textual practice can be usefully read as creating what W.J.T. Mitchell calls an 'imagetext.' Mitchell points out that, as the graphic representation of language, writing is never a purely verbal form. Texts are 'seen' by the reader and consequently "incorporate viscosity quite literally the moment they are written or printed in visual form" (Mitchell 95). Any given text, whether or not it seeks to represent specifically visual images, therefore already incorporates the visual into the verbal. Mitchell argues that "[w]riting, in its physical, graphical form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the 'imagetext' incarnate" (95). Mitchell uses the term 'imagetext' to refer to written representations of visual images in a way that does not rely on the traditional binaries between word and image, sound and sight, literature and visual art. The 'imagetext', according to Mitchell, is a discursive site where visual and verbal experiences are represented in an "unstable dialectic", one which can be "understood as a composite, synthetic form or as a gap or fissure in representation" (Mitchell 83). This is not to suggest, however, that the two media are equally present in Brand's texts, for the imagetext is a linguistic form that hopes to capture the visual sense, and not an intermediary representation. Mitchell clarifies the role of the visual image in the written representation when he argues that "[a] verbal representation cannot represent -- that is, make present -- its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can 'cite,' but never 'sight' their objects" (152). It is just this kind of verbal citing of the visual sight that

Brand deploys in “hard against the soul,” and which creates a dialectic between discursive fields within the textual practice of the poem that reflects the poem’s thematizing of the dialectical relationship between the self and its body, the self and others. It is through this representation of visual systems of meaning in verbal language, moreover, that Brand both upholds and subverts the textual as a site of corporeal enactment and inscription.

In “hard against the soul,” Brand uses an imagetext to represent how the eye which sees is also seen. This creates a poetic speaker whose subjectivity, as Cook argues, is “constructed at the intersection of the hidden and the revealed” (90). The dialectic which her poem establishes between self and other results in the subject’s fluctuation between its internal desires and the external realization of these desires on and through bodies. These positions between which the subject fluctuates can never be resolved or conflated into a single position. Instead, the subject’s very shifting between internal self and external body, and between the body and its other, only make sense with reference to a mediating boundary between which the subject moves and whose stability is always deferred. Judith Butler points to the difficulty in representing bodies and the borders between them when she asks,

if the body is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment ... that constitutes its ‘interior’ signification on the surface?” (139)

In “hard against the soul”, Brand attempts to answer this question using the language of the imagetext to represent the always shifting boundary between external bodies and inner selves.

While poem X of “hard against the soul” represents visual images as they are perceived and stored in their narrators’ memories, in other works Brand creates imagetexts around formal visual images, and particularly around photographic representations of women’s bodies. As a visual art form, photographic portraits have much in common with attempts at the verbal representation of the Black female body.

Like verbal language, the photographic can no longer be received as a system of neutral representation, as a mechanical confirmation of the social real. In her 1973 essay *On Photography*, Susan Sontag argues that “reality has come to seem more and more like what we are shown by cameras” (161) and that consequently, “to possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real” (164). Photographs, like words, may have meanings which are ideologically staged or intended by their authors, but the body/selves they represent are always already inscribed within the established discourse of the medium. Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues that the photographed female body functions not merely as a referent for the photograph, but that it is always already a sign inscribed with specific meanings:

In most of their normative uses and functions, photographic pictures function to confirm and reproduce, if not actually themselves produce, messages and meanings which are already determined and marked by dominant ideological formations. The female body, to take an obvious example, is already densely meaningful before it receives a photographic representation; the photographs may frame one set of meanings and connotations over others, but the important thing is that such meanings precede the photographic act. (83)

As in dominant written discourse, then, photographic discourse mediates performances of the female body. By using ekphrasis -- the verbal representation of visual representation - - to describe narrators’ encounters with photographic portraits of their ancestors, Brand articulates the boundaries between the images of bodies and the articulation of their selves.<sup>3</sup> Because they do not have direct access to the bodies that they view in the photographs, the narrators’ perceptions of these bodies are shaped by the discursive powers of both visual and verbal discourse.

When they look at the other represented in the photographs, Brand’s narrators are able to speak to it as it was captured in a specific context or time-space and to fluctuate between the borders of this time-space and their own. The poem in *No Language is Neutral* titled “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater” centers on a photograph of an old woman that the narrator accidentally uncovers and then describes. Brand does not include this photograph in her text, dispensing with the actual visual representation altogether and

rendering it instead in ekphrastic language. In this poem, the narrator's identity is spoken around the photograph of an unrelated older Black woman to whom the narrator feels connected. Aligning her own identity with that of the woman in the portrait, this narrator represents in language the body that is represented in the photograph; she does not have direct access, through sight, to that body. Brand's use of ekphrasis implies that the 'truth' of Mammy Prater's body is never accessible to the narrator, and that she can only attempt to represent her visual experience in language as a means to insert Mammy Prater into a discursive reality. Thus twice removed from any possibility of a referent, this description moves beyond the modernist trope of the visual displacing the verbal ('a picture is worth a thousand words'), or vice versa (a caption explaining a picture), to create an imagetext.<sup>4</sup>

The preface to "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater" provides the context of the poem: "On looking at 'the photograph of Mammy Prater an ex-slave, 115 years old when her photograph was taken' (17). Although the poem begins with this suggestion that the subject and context of the photograph are provided to viewers by a caption, Brand goes on to subvert this apparently referential relationship between the verbal and the visual. The narrator sees the photographic image and then describes it in language. The relationship between the woman in the portrait and the woman who narrates the poem, then, is reciprocal: one eye sees the other eye gazing out from the photograph. That Mammy Prater is more subject than object, as much spectator as she is exhibit, is revealed in the narrator's description that

she waited for her century to turn  
she waited until she was one hundred and fifteen  
years old to take a photograph  
to take a photograph and to put those eyes in it  
she waited until the technique of photography was  
suitable developed  
to make sure the picture would be clear  
to make sure no crude daguerreotype would lose  
her image (17)



Mammy Prater, according to the narrator, waits for a better technology to mediate between her image and its representation. She is as much the subject and agent of the image as she is its captured object. Mammy Prater's waiting is allied with the subversion of staging the female body in the photograph, as well as with the subversion of active looking. Mammy Prater resists domination and counteracts her experiences as a slave through transforming inactivity or perceived laziness into a form of agency and rebellion: "she waited until it suited her / to take this photograph and to put those eyes in it" (17). The photograph cannot, therefore, be interpreted as a simple capturing of her image, for Brand implies that in the execution of the image lies the possibility of a performative articulation of the self.

The poem's representation of the interplay between the visual and verbal, in which the body of the ancestor is mediated first by the technology of the photograph and then by the narrator's eye and voice, indicates that Mammy Prater employs language other than the verbal to perform her body/self. The narrator describes how the posing and photographing of her ancestor's body transforms her body into a visual text of slavery. Mammy Prater spent 115 years readying her body for the photograph that would speak the internal and external suffering of her life:

... she perfected this pose  
she sculpted it over a shoulder of pain,  
a thing like despair which she never called  
this name for she would not have lasted  
the fields, the ones she ploughed  
on the days that she was a mule ... (18)

Choosing visual over verbal language as her legacy is both a part of and a representation of the psychological and physical experiences of slavery; Mammy Prater does not name her suffering because to call it into verbal language would be to submit to it. As Toni Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark*, the slaves' predicament in the New World was that they were "visible to a fault"; not only did "this slave population [have] a distinctive color; it was that this color 'meant' something" (489). For Morrison, it is this inscription

of the visual image of the slaves' bodies in verbal language that reveals "the alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances" (489).

Mammy Prater, however, refuses to apply this kind of relationship between the visual and the spoken to herself. She waits all of her life to represent herself visually in an image that performs both her suffering and her survival. The speaker's description of Mammy Prater's performance before the camera reveals the importance of the subject in the process of portrait-taking.<sup>5</sup> Susan Butler focuses on women's roles in photographic portraiture to suggest that rather than being passive objects, women who position themselves as the subject of a portrait necessarily transform photography's conventions: "The woman who photographs herself is in a position to marshall all the resources of self-presentation (dress, setting, pose) and to ally them with the power of active looking -- to create images that put into question the dominant conventions of both" (S. Butler 51). Mammy Prater's waiting and posing for the photograph is just this kind of performance, in which the woman who stages her own portrait performs as much as a subject looking out from the image as she does as the viewed object. When she poses, Mammy Prater transforms her body into a work of art: she perfected her pose when "she sculpted it over a shoulder of pain" and the fields that she plowed "left their etching on the gait of her legs" (18). The speaker describes Mammy Prater's body as being moulded into its image through two visual art techniques, sculpture and etching, which wear away at surfaces to create an image. These artistic metaphors represent Mammy Prater's body as a surface which has been deliberately re-shaped by both her self and her experiences. Mammy Prater's body becomes a sculptured art object captured within the frame of the photographic art object, but both of these representations are controlled by the woman herself.

Mammy Prater may not use verbal language, but she does use and subvert the conventions of visual language to perform her self. It is then left to the narrator to write Mammy Prater's photograph, for the ancestor wrote "in those eyes what her fingers could

not script” (19). This link between eyes and fingers and perception and voice is dialectical. Although it is the narrator who makes Mammy Prater present in verbal language, the narrator can only write the poem because Mammy Prater made herself present in visual language. The narrator’s subjectivity is constructed around the body of the photographic subject at the same time that this subject’s body is constructed by the narrator.

Brand overcomes the remoteness or otherness the speaker may feel towards Mammy Prater by using ekphrasis to represent the two women’s discursive performances. The usefulness of ekphrasis in explaining this poem is that it is a textual practice whose claim over images simultaneously appropriates and liberates. Added to this ambivalence in ekphrastic language between capturing the image and enabling its representation is a sense of transgression and defiance. Grant F. Scott notes that, “everywhere in ekphrastic studies we encounter the language of subterfuge, of conspiracy; there is something taboo about moving across media, even as there is something profoundly liberating” (Scott xiii). The poem concludes on this very note of subterfuge by suggesting Mammy Prater’s uncanny ability to see her audience:

she planned it down to the day ...  
this moment of  
my turning the leaves of a book,  
noticing, her eyes. (19)

Not only did Mammy Prater pose for the photographer, the narrator suggests that she also staged the moment of her portrait’s unveiling. The past foresees the present to reveal that there is a different kind of sight in Mammy Prater’s eye, one whose range extends beyond her actual field of vision. The power of Mammy Prater’s vision -- both her gaze out from the photograph and her perception of the future -- infuses the verbal language of the poem as well as the narrator’s construction of her own subjectivity through that of her ancestor’s. Mammy Prater and the narrator both act, in their different time-spaces, to overcome the distancing effect traditionally ascribed to the gaze. This work that both

body/selves perform in their respective media is an example of what Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins propose as a means to disrupt the traditional relationships between the gaze and the gazed upon : “What can be done in the photograph is to manipulate, perhaps unconsciously, the gaze of the other ... so that it allows us to see ourselves reflected in their eyes in ways which are comfortable, familiar, and pleasurable” (365). By creating a text that reinscribes the gaze in just this way, Brand implies that both verbal and visual systems of representation are in flux: the image and the word simultaneously construct each other, just as the viewing subject and the photographic subject simultaneously construct each other.

Mammy Prater’s performance of her self through the posing of her body is read by the narrator through the lens of that body’s regulation under slavery. Perhaps more than other visual media, photography has been a tool for the representation of non-European subjects as other. The visual narratives constructed by colonialist travellers and anthropologists have today been modified into the neo-colonialist uses of photography -- in travel magazines, advertising, and news media --to capture and classify images of the non-European as primitive and pre-modern<sup>6</sup>. Through this legacy, ekphrasis has often been the unnoticed trope of metropolitan voyeurs of colonized peoples and lands as they attempt to aestheticize ‘native’ life, monumentalize the colonial project, or fetishize the other by constructing verbal narratives to represent their visual images. Counteracting this effect, Brand mobilizes ekphrasis to suggest that the gaze need not dominate or distance its subject and that ekphrasis can be a tool in linguistic practices of self-mythmaking. While photography may have served the colonialist project, it can also be subverted in ways that transform the medium and that allow the photographic subject to return the colonizer/photographer’s gaze, or that fracture dominant readings of the bodies represented in the photographs.

In the short story “Photograph,” Brand uses ekphrastic language to illustrate that the subject’s participation in language and in photographic portraiture is formed within the

larger social contexts of both discursive systems. Since photography and language are both fields in which social laws are constructed and regulated, however, this short story's narrator struggles with the verbal representation of the Black female self whose body she sees in visual representations. There are three descriptions of photographs in "Photograph." Each of these imagetexts represents one of the three generations of women in the narrator's family as well as the sociopolitical contexts in which they pose for a photographic portrait. The story opens with the narrator's self-contradictory statement that "My grandmother has left no trace, no sign of her self. There is no photograph, except one which she took with much trouble for her identity card" (53). The narrator proceeds to use the event of her grandmother's preparations for the identity card photograph as a thematic centre around which to construct her childhood in her grandmother's house, a childhood itself constructed around photographs of three generations of women: the narrator and her sisters and cousins, her mother, and her grandmother.

Interwoven with these descriptions of snapshots and portraits are narratives of migration and homecoming, colonialism and independence. This short story, like "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater", can be summed up epigrammatically. Lynette Hunter points out that this density then extends to a descriptive ground on which Brand builds. She describes "Photograph" as a "narrative excursion occasioned by looking at a faded photograph of her grandmother, which tersely put is saying that her grandmother acted as her mother for many years while her mother was 'away' earning money, and that on her mother's return her grandmother soon died" (Hunter 272). This faded photograph, however, is not simply a portrait or a snapshot. It is the photograph her grandmother is required to take for an identity card when their nation claims independence from England. The narrator states that she "remember[s] the day that she had to take it. It was for voting, when we got Independence; and my grandmother, with fear in her eyes, woke up that morning, got dressed, put on her hat, and left" (53). This photograph is thus a

visual image that, like the body of Mammy Prater, is metonymic for a larger political and social reality. As well as being occasioned by their country's political liberation, the procedure to get the photograph highlights the grandmother's position in a social context. The narrator, as well as her brothers and sisters, live in a world dominated by their grandmother's rituals and caprice in which the children identify their grandmother's anxieties:

As she rarely left the house, my grandmother felt that everyone on the street where we lived would be looking at her, going to take her picture for her identity card. We felt the same, too, and worried as she left, stepping heavily yet shakily down the short hill that lead to the savannah, at the far end of which was the community centre. (55)

The body that will be captured by the photograph thus moves through the surveillance of the neighbourhood, being watched from behind curtains by the neighbours (55). The grandmother's body becomes meaningful in how it appears to others as it prepares to be recorded by the state in an official photograph.

Verbal language, in the form of the narrator's recollections, frames the portrait in a context that suggests neither representation is whole. Either the narrator's memories or the photograph itself is incomplete. Looking at the image in the present, the narrator states that "[t]he photograph now does not look like her. It is gray and pained. In real, she was round and comfortable. When we knew her she had a full lap and beautiful arms; her cocoa brown skin smelled of wood smoke and familiar" (60). Whether it is the photograph or the narrator's perceptual memory that has distorted her grandmother's body and identity is left undetermined. What is certain, however, is that the identity card portrait which inspires the narrative does so because it is unrepresentative of a whole grandmother, while at the same time the narrative can not completely explain the photograph. After her grandmother's death, the narrator laments that

She had left us full and empty of her. When someone took the time to check, there was no photograph of my grandmother, no figure of my grandmother in layers of clothing and odd-sided socks, no finger stroking the air in reprimand, no arm under her chin at the front window or crossed over her breasts waiting for us. (76)

The construction of her grandmother's identity, and by implication her own identity as well, is plagued for the narrator by her ancestor's simultaneous presence and absence, her individuality and her connectedness to a larger collective.

The impact of these ambiguities in the visual and verbal construction of her grandmother is reflected in another photograph that is not completely representative of the self whose body it captures. The narrator and her siblings live with their grandmother, but she assumes the role of mother because, as the narrator explains, "Our mothers were away. Away-away or in the country-away. That's all we knew of them except for their photographs which we used tauntingly in our battles about whose mother was prettier" (54). These absent mothers have left their Caribbean country to find work in England. The only contact the children have with their mothers is through the parcels they send home, one of which includes the above photograph. The narrator's recollection of how the children use these photographs to compete for the prettiest mother indicates that the children can only relate to their mothers through the visual images of their bodies. When her mother does return home, however, the narrator and her siblings must cope with their mother as a self; the children must contend with the personality of the woman whose identity they have only previously known in its surface inscription as the image of a pretty woman. When the narrator's mother first returns to the grandmother's house, she behaves with the formality and kindness of a temporary guest. As her stay lengthens, however, the mother begins "ordering" her children about and the narrator states that "the wars began" within the family (70). It is only once her mother performs the role of a disciplining parent that the narrator realizes the discrepancy between the photographic image of her body and the inner self it represents. Recalling this conflict when she is an adult, the narrator imagines how her life in England must have hardened her mother in ways not visible in her photograph:

Those winters in England, when she must have bicycled to Hampstead General Hospital from which we once received a letter and a postcard with her smiling to us astride a bicycle, must have hardened the smile which my grandmother said

that she had and which was dimly recognizable from the photograph. These winters, which she wrote about and which we envied as my sister read them to us, she must have hated. And the thought of four ungrateful children who deprived her of a new dress or stockings to travel London, made my mother unmerciful on her return. (70)

When she is separated from her children, the visual image they hold of their mother is one of a distant and smiling woman. It is only when she reappears in their lives, however, that the narrator can situate this visual image within a verbal narrative that considers the harsh effects of this separation and distance on her mother's inner self. The photograph of their mother, like that of their grandmother, does not represent a full image of the inner life of its viewed object, and must be augmented with a verbal description of the larger sociopolitical contexts in which the photograph is taken.

The third photograph in this story is also explained in ekphrastic language that highlights how the seeing subject of the narrator can not fully represent the photographic subject. Just as the occasion of her grandmother's identity card picture and her mother's photograph from England are related to larger social movements, so is the photograph of the narrator and her siblings related to their social context: it is taken to send to her mother while she is away. The narrator states:

There's a photograph of Genevieve and me and two of my sisters someplace. We took it to send to England. My grandmother dressed us up, put my big sister in charge of us, giving her 50 cents tied up in a handkerchief and pinned to the waistband of her dress, and warned us not to give her any trouble. We marched to Wong's Studio on the Coffee, the main road in our town, and fidgeted as Mr. Wong fixed us in front of a promenade scene to take our picture. My little sister cried through it all and sucked her fingers. Nobody knows that it's me in the photograph, but my sisters and Genevieve look like themselves. (59)

The others look like themselves, but the self looks like an other. Just as her grandmother is not 'herself' visually, and must be made so verbally, so does the photograph of the narrator displace any notion that the visual is capable of fully representing the self inscribed by the body. Jean-Francois Chevrier explains this alienating function of self-portraiture in Lacanian terms to argue that

every self-portrait is inevitably, by its very nature, a doubling, an image of the other ... we can no longer escape the obvious truth that every identification presupposes the mediation of an image and that there is no identity that does not pass



through this process of alienation ... every self-portrait, even the simplest and least staged, is the portrait of another. (9)

In the narrator's description of her childhood photograph, however, she is not the only one who fails to recognize the image of herself: no one recognizes her in the photograph. The alienating function of the self-portrait identified by Chevrier is so complete in this instance that the image becomes unrelated to its referent for all viewers. Since the description of her photographic is ekphrastic, then by extension this alienation of the self in viewing its own photographic portrait is also present in Brand's representation of the image in verbal language.

Whereas the portrait of an other verbally described in "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater" becomes the means through which that narrator constructs her self, the narrator's photographic portrait of her self in this story has an opposite, alienating effect on her identity. The narrator is different from her siblings and her relatives because she is the one who, from her perspective as an adult, is unidentifiable in the picture. The narrator's inability to see her self in the visual image of her childhood is perhaps the reason why she deploys verbal language to construct this childhood: the story itself becomes a representation in language of the self that is not represented fully in the photograph. All three generations of women, then, are captured at specific moments by the camera but these images need to be framed in verbal language by the viewing subject in order to situate the images within the sociopolitical context of the photographic moment. The discursive field of the visual must consequently be framed within that of the verbal to convey the significance of these circumstances.

While the three portraits in "Photograph" may not be fully representative of their subjects, then, they do speak to the positioning of these characters within larger social and political movements. Each of the generations of women in this story are captured within a specific time-space. The narrator's ekphrastic descriptions of these images reveals that these temporal and spatial contexts situate the photographed subjects and frame them for her own gaze. Unlike Mammy Prater, the narrator, her mother, and her grandmother do

not wait until they are able to perform their selves in ways counter to dominant inscription in order to have their portrait taken: their photographs are taken out of the social and political necessity for others to be able to identify them. Because these photographs are motivated by the need for others to gaze at their bodies, the narrator does not describe the photographic subjects as gazing back at her. Instead, the bodies represented in the photographs seem distant and other. Whereas “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater” implies that the subject who acts with agency in the taking of her portrait may gaze upon those who view her image, “Photograph” suggests that when the image is motivated and inscribed by the social space and not the self, the photographed body does not perform its self or gaze at the viewer. Although the narrator’s verbal descriptions of her self, her mother, and her grandmother describes them as agents, their visual images do not articulate this enactment of their subjectivity.

The subject who performs with agency in the realm of photographic portraiture is one who desires that her image be captured and who performs it in a way that inscribes her self visually. The discrepancy between photographic representations in the poem and the short story discussed above, the differences between the self who positions her body and the self whose body is positioned, is represented as occurring within the same character in *In Another Place, Not Here*. Verlia desires her image to be captured for posterity in a photograph, but she reconfigures her appearance to perform the social and political context in which her self is situated. When she first arrives at the airport in Toronto and then travels to her relative’s home in Sudbury, Verlia imagines the unfamiliarity of the new places in visual, cinematic terms:

In Sudbury all of the people are white except for her aunt and uncle. She feels a glare, a standing off, a glow around their bodies, her face burns in the grey light. She is not sure that it is the same feeling that she had anticipated, but she feels out there, in the centre. And at the airport in Toronto she had felt that way. Important, at the centre of the screen, her hair permed for the first time, her leatherette suit, her silky shirt. She had assumed a cinematic distance. (137)

Verlia imagines herself performing as the star in her own film to both situate herself as central to the narrative of her new life and to distance herself as the subject who gazes out from behind the camera. Soon realising that her relatives' suburban lives are not ones she wishes to emulate, Verlia leaves Sudbury to find the Black Power Movement in Toronto. Verlia's entry into the Movement is marked by her entry into a world of ideological messages and visual images. In order to identify herself with the Movement, Verlia changes her physical appearance and her body begins to perform in ways that conform to the Movement's ideology: "She wants to take a photograph in bell-bottom jeans and a green dashiki. Her hair fills the subway door at Bathurst and Bloor. And there's a way that she walks, a way her Afro demands, straight up, Black power straight up" (158). When the narrator describes Verlia as wanting to capture her new image in a photograph, she suggests that Verlia needs visual confirmation of the new identity written on her body. There is no indication that there is an actual photograph, only Verlia's desire to inscribe her new body/self in a visual image.

The narrator then states that "In another photograph she wears plaid bell-bottoms and the Cuban flag on her chest, she is laughing, walking across a park with other brothers and sisters" (158). It is unclear whether this is an actual photograph or, like the passage that precedes it, Verlia's perception of how she would look in a photograph. What is evident is that Verlia desires her own body, and its captured image in a photograph, to represent her political agency. This agency, however, is regulated by the social context in which she lives. Verlia's new appearance allows her to identify with the brothers and sisters of the Movement, but she also conceives of this period from the position of a spectator and not a participant: "She's come into some real love here. How did she fall into that sweetness. Look at us laughing into the park. Henson-Garvey Park, we named it, right here in Toronto. Look at us laughing into this new name and into our new selves" (158). The narrative, which at this point is constructed through Verlia's consciousness, shifts between the third and the first person to illustrate that Verlia is both

subject and object, both agent and the spectator of this agency. Brand represents Verlia's new-found collective identity by emphasizing the visual, first by describing Verlia's new appearance, and then by shifting into Verlia's consciousness as she recalls the images expressive of that identity. The images here are constructed in two visual sites: the narrator's visual memory and the formal visual site of photographs, both of which are represented verbally. The ekphrastic language through which Verlia imagines her involvement in the Movement consequently positions her subjectivity in a time-space at the same time as this description emphasizes the very processes of its representation. James Heffernan explains how ekphrastic language can achieve this when he distinguishes it from other techniques that mingle the written with the visual: "ekphrasis differs from both iconicity and pictorialism because it explicitly represents representation itself. What ekphrasis represents in words, therefore, must itself be *representational*" (300). Brand's representation of Verlia's involvement in the Movement is, therefore, a description of the visual representation of this time-space that exists in Verlia's memory and in photographs.

Verlia's recollection of her past in visual terms and her desire at that time to express herself in a certain style coincides with a social and cultural context that recognizes the visual as a site of discursive power. Just as Verlia performs her body as the site of racial pride, and in so doing counteracts dominant 'readings' of the Black body with visual images of the slogan 'Black is beautiful,' so does she collect pictures of her ideological heroes. The narrator lists the people whose images Verlia collects in a shoebox of clippings. This gallery includes photographs of prominent cultural figures, and in particular

one of Chairman Mao Zedong smiling into his mole in Yenan, one of Nina Simone in concert, one of Adam Clayton Powell preaching in New York, one of Ghandi, his glasses glaring, his hands cupped, one of Rosa Parks looking small, one of a lynching in the south, one of Fidel with "Fidel!" written over the top, one of the Black Panthers, armed on the steps of a courthouse. (161)

These images become representative of the global struggle in which she performs a localized role. Verlia views the others in these photographs, many of which she takes from newspapers, as gazing back at her. For Verlia, the image of Fidel Castro is one in which “[h]e looked to be looking right at her and she’d never seen such joy before” (161). While these photographs may inspire and motivate Verlia, however, they only make sense within the context of her entry into revolutionary language. As much as Verlia cherishes her shoebox of photographs, she also confirms the ideological messages that they represent through reading and speaking the writings of those whose images she gazes upon. When she runs away from her relatives’ stifling lives in Sudbury to find the Movement in Toronto, Verlia reads the works of Franz Fanon, Nikki Giovanni, and Marx and reflects that

She wants to live in all the poetry and all the songs, all the revolutionary words shooting the bus double time down the highway leaving her uncle’s life of capitulation and dying. She knows that the minute she hits the subway, “Power to the People!” will bloom from her lips. (165)

The photographs are only meaningful to Verlia because the bodies that they represent articulate their selves in writing. Verlia’s identification with the Movement and its heroes occurs when she supplements visual images with verbal language and creates imagetexts of the Movement for herself. Verlia consequently performs as an agent asserting her political will at the same time that this agency is inscribed within the terms of a larger social context. Verlia’s rebellion is contained by the rules of the Movement and she is not able to perform an alternate self until she has access to an alternate set of physical performances.

Brand represents Verlia as a young idealist who may conceive of the alternate performances of her self through her body as a form of agency, but they are nonetheless inscribed by the social group in which she is situated. When she looks at the images of her heroes and reads their revolutionary writings, Verlia is represented as having her own beliefs confirmed and as wanting to emulate revolutionary leaders: she finds her new self

through these imagetexts and begins to style her own body according to the symbols and discourses meaningful to the Movement.

In each of her texts constructed around visuality, Brand focuses on her characters' desires for discursive construction of the self in relation to its body. The verbal representations of the visual in "hard against the soul" express the feelings of desire experienced by the viewing female subject for both the female subject in her sight and for her own body. The ekphrastic language of "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater" represents a similar longing, albeit a nonsexual one, for the agency of a self that is able to harness its own performances to construct an identity. The narrators' descriptions of snapshots in "Photograph," however, articulate a different kind of desire, one in which the self longs for the representation of the body in ways that will allow the full subject to enter herself into discourse. When Brand represents one of her characters using ekphrastic language, as she does with Verlia, it becomes apparent that the visual and verbal inscription of the body -- and the self it performs -- may be enacted by that subject, but that the subject cannot escape larger social and discursive forces. In each of these texts, Brand argues that the import of the subject exceeds that of the discourse in which it is constructed. The act of gazing at images of other women's bodies and the body of the self is one in which the viewer can assert the agency of looking and inscribing. When the photographic subjects also have a gaze, however, the exchange of these glances repositions the viewing subject and requires her to negotiate the relationship between her own self and her body, as well as that between her self and the other in her sight. The verbal representation of visuality becomes a textual inscription of these negotiations which Brand's characters may never completely resolve. Brand's description of this negotiation, however, implicates representation itself as a site of subject formation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brand is the associate writer and director of four documentary films for the National Film Board of Canada's Studio D: *Older, Stronger, Wiser* (1989); *Sisters in the Struggle* (1991); *Long Time Comin'* (1994); and *Listening for Something -- Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation* (1995).

<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars discuss the gaze. Feminist film critic Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1985) and visual art critic John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) established the gaze as masculine, positioning the spectator as an active male and the observed as a passive female. Other scholars have begun to question this equation of the gaze with the masculine. Frederic Jameson argues in "Pleasure: A Political Issue" (1983) that there may be legitimate pleasures associated in looking that do not derive from the desire to dominate, degrade, or distance the seen other. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins summarize the more recent work on women spectators when they state that such studies "suggest that viewers may have several possible responses to images, moving toward and away from identification with the imaged person ... looking need not be equated with controlling" (365). It is this approach to the gaze that I undertake in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> This definition of ekphrasis appears in both Mitchell's article "Ekphrasis and the Other" and Heffernan's "Ekphrasis and Representation."

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the modernist era, photography premised upon a realist epistemology dominated the form and was never successfully dislodged within the popular sphere by a self-conscious or avant-garde modernist counter-movement. David Joselit explains how the modernist ideology of photographic realism, in which the image is viewed as the mechanical reproduction of a referent, continues to inform the popular reception of photographs: "The equation between pictures and words is so 'natural' to us -- so profoundly assumed -- that its significance is easily overlooked. Common wisdom tells us that photographs pay us with language: that the value of a picture may be measured by the words it can displace, or replace" (69). Joselit believes that the modernist photograph was idealized as a self-contained "transparent 'decisive moment'", whereas recent postmodern photography "has manifested itself as a site where image and language are in flux" (69). While much of the postmodernist photography to which Joselit refers incorporates visual and verbal images within the same frame (as in the works of Barbara Krueger or Cindy Sherman), Brand does not provide both the image and the text: the photograph is an absent referent represented in ekphrastic language.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes describes the subject's role in their portrait when he writes in *Camera Lucida* that "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing', I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it ..." (10).

<sup>6</sup> A number of visual theorists expand upon this point. Eliot Weinberger, in "The Camera People," argues that the practices of ethnographic filmmakers were established by the photographers who preceded them in capturing images of non-European peoples: "Where travelers had gone to collect adventures, missionaries to collect souls, anthropologists to collect data, and settlers to collect riches, filmmakers were soon setting out to collect and preserve human behaviours: the only good Indian was a filmed

Indian" (4). This connection between colonialism and images is discussed with specific reference to the role of *National Geographic* magazine by Lutz and Collins. Their principle argument, which can be extended to any number of photographic enterprises by Westerners in non-Western countries, is that the "magazine's gaze at the Third World operated to represent it to an American audience in ways which can but do not always shore up a Western cultural identity or sense of self as modern and civilized" (366). Finally, Lucy Lippard observes in her discussion of a 1906 photograph of the Beaver's, a Native Canadian family, that "one of the hegemonic devices of colonialism (postcolonialism is hardly free of it either) has been to isolate the Other in another time, a time that also becomes another place -- The Past -- even when the chronological time is the present" (177).



#### ***CHAPTER 4: Between the Canefield and the City***

Brand's emphasis on the past and its narration as a means through which selves may comprehend their positions in relation to language and images is also relevant to her representation of space. While her characters must contend with historical slavery and its legacy of racism in order to articulate their subjectivities in discourse, so too must they contend with this historical awareness to articulate selfhood in relation to their environments. The characters' attempts to ascribe meaning to their locations are attempts to assert their interior subjectivities. This struggle for agency, however, is often thwarted when hierarchies of difference, legible both on the body and in social space, problematize any counter-hegemonic articulation of self and space. The two most frequent geographical sites in Brand's works are the plantation canefield of a Caribbean island and the large metropolis of Toronto. Despite the different social and political structures of each of these locations, they share similarities in the way that they construct their subjects according to the differences marked on bodies. In both the rural Caribbean and in metropolitan Canada, Brand's characters are defined publicly by their labour in which their bodies become the tools they must use to provide their material needs. The physical labour that is demanded by both spaces also, ironically, denies these subjects the right of belonging to their locations. Relegated to demeaning and brutal physical labour because of both their gender and their race, these characters are denied full articulation of their selves and are unable to claim selfhood in relation to their larger communities.

Because their relationship to space is defined by the labour of their bodies, which is itself defined by the positioning of these bodies as subordinate and other, Brand's characters experience non-belonging. Their bodies become the most intimate of spatialities as well as the central site within subjective constructions of social spaces. While many of Brand's characters articulate themselves as whole subjects while their bodies are fragmented and bound to their labour, the connection between this struggle and the

construction of spaces is most evident in Brand's representation of Elizete. At the beginning of *In Another Place, Not Here*, Elizete is situated within the physical world of the canefield where Verlia has just arrived from the metropolitan sphere. When Elizete first sees Verlia, she recognizes the other woman as a means to escape a space defined by its brutal treatment of her body:

and when Verl come along I see my chance out of what ordinary, out of the plenty day when all it have for a woman to do is lie down and let a man beat against she body, and work cane and chop up she foot and make children and choke on the dryness in she chest and have only one road in and the same road out and know that she tied to the ground and can never lift up. (4)

Elizete's life in the Caribbean is circumscribed by her gender; her body is regulated through sexual violence and painful work. That this identification of her self with the functions of her body is part of a larger, spatial regulation is evident in Elizete's comment that: "I born to clean Isaiah' house and work cane since I was a child and say what you want Isaiah feed me and all I have to do is lay down under him in the night and work the cane in the day"(4). Elizete recognizes that her destiny in her natal place is to be defined by the subordination of her body to the conditions of production and reproduction through which she will have her subsistence needs met.<sup>1</sup> Elizete articulates that her location regulates her body's relationship to its larger environment. That this social regulation of individual bodies sustains an oppressive social configuration is something that Elizete recognizes but cannot alter. Elizete nonetheless imagines running away to a place where she is not so closely tied to her body and, through it, to nature and the earth. This connection between the most localized space of her body and the larger space of her community can be understood through Sidonie Smith's argument that "the body seems to be the nearest, most central home we know," and that consequently the body "is our most material site of potential homelessness" (267). The performances of her body in the fields and in Isaiah's house regulate Elizete's interior self in such a way that her body becomes

the most intimate site of her homelessness; the alienation of her self from her body is indicative of her non-belonging to a larger environment.

That Black West Indians cannot feel they belong in the Caribbean is expressed in the narrator's commentary on the settlement of the canefield plantation by Elizete's ancestors. The narrator explains that

They had not come here willingly looking for food or water or liking the way the place set off against the sky or even for hunger. They had not come because the hunting was good or the ground moist for planting. They had not come moving into the forest just after the rainy season. They had not come because they saw great cities foreshadowed in the horizon or rum shops sprawling with their dancing and laughter. Not because a shape overtook them in geometry or because after observing speeding clouds they coveted a new landfall. They had been taken. Plain. Hard. Rough. (41)

The people who first inhabited Elizete's island had no choice in their relocation and the plantation is, consequently, more recognizable to them as the spatial representation of a history of negations and forced labour than as a site of self-realization. The cane workers' ancestors who suffered under slavery ascribed meanings to their place to express the brutalization of their bodies. The narrator illustrates how the workers express the pain and alienation they experience spatially. The plantation is full of

Places they skirted for many years. 'Never walk here, you will raise the dead and they will follow you home or make you lose your way.' Places where someone was hung, places that didn't need description or writing down. Certainly not owning. And belonging? They were past it. It was not wide enough, not gap enough, not distance enough. Not rip enough, belonging. Belonging was too small, too small for their magnificent rage. (42)

The space in which the cane workers labour contains the history of brutalization and slavery as a residual pressure. Their experience of the space they occupy and, by extension, their own spatio-social location resonates with a disturbing historical significance. The experiences of their dead ancestors continue to affect their understanding of the plantation, and these experiences are readily accessible through the continuity of the space. The narrator states that Elizete and the cane workers are as

constituted by the plantations' past as the spirits of the dead slaves are trapped in the site of their death:

And then they were trapped, the way even spirits could be trapped like the living. And the living, they lived in the past or had no past but a present that was filled, peopled with the past. No matter their whims and flights into the future some old face or old look, some old pain would appear. (44)

The ancestors' experiences occurred in a site that continues to be the location of physical and psychical oppression. Any sense of belonging to this location, moreover, is impossible when it is understood in both its past and present contexts: the only site the cane workers own is "the sublime territory of rage" to which the first slaves belonged and which they pass on to their descendents (43).

The slaves' 'belonging' to an interior site of rage indicates that their physical suffering does not completely annihilate their interior subjectivities. Elizete may not feel a sense of belonging to the exterior world of the plantation or to the exteriority of her body, but these regulations of her interior self are not total. Elizete finds temporary relief in the fantasies she constructs when she runs away from the house to a nearby sand quarry. It is here that she can find the peace to indulge in an imaginative life and to fantasize about having a body that explodes with its suffering:

I went in the evenings after work to the sand quarry while he sleep. The salmon dank sides rise up around me and I was silent there. It was a place where I had peace, or I wouldn't call it peace but calm, and I shovelled, the sweat drizzling from my body as I think and think of escaping him ... There in the damp, it make me calm, calm, calm and hollow inside me. If I dig enough it cool me and take my mind off the junction. I feel my body full up and burst. All my skin split. (11)

In the quarry, Elizete fantasizes about running away to places she has never seen but which she imagines will provide a sanctuary after she fulfills her dream of killing Isaiah and ending her subservience to him and the plantation. Elizete wants to kill her husband by "taking his neck with a cutlass" (12). The method of the imagined murder would transform the tool with which she must work the fields to a weapon with which she can rid her life of sexual violence. This connection between her marriage and her work, the

two oppressive forces which violate her body in order to curb Elizete's agency, is one of which Elizete is quite aware. When she later recalls how Isaiah used to whip her for running away to the sand quarry, Elizete describes how these lashings on her legs are similar to the way that her labour marks her legs:

All over from one thing and another, one time or another, is how Isaiah whip them for running, is how he wanted to break me from bad habit. Whip. 'Don't move.' Whip. 'Don't move.' Whip. 'Run you want to run! Don't move.' Is how the cane cut them from working. Same rhythm. (55).

The motions with which Isaiah whips Elizete's legs repeat the motions with which the cane cuts them and mark her as the object of the forces of production and reproduction which shape her 'home.'

The violence with which she imagines murdering Isaiah, which would not only end her sexual oppression but which would also end her life of indenture in the fields, commingles in Elizete's mind with the peace that she will feel after the murder. She dreams of running away to Maracaibo and refashioning her body in this flight to a new space:

I dream it is a place where a woman can live after she done take the neck of a man. Fearless. I dream my eyes, black and steady in my black face and never close. I will wear a black skirt, shapely like a wing and down to my toes. I will fly to Maracaibo in it and you will see nothing of me but my black eyes in my black face and my black skirt swirling over thick living vine. (12)

Once she has rid herself of Isaiah and fled the work to which she is bound, Elizete imagines that she will move above the earth to defy spatial boundaries on the ground. As well, she dreams that her body will assume a new intensity, that her eyes will be open and that her new self will be seen in her face, the part of her body which matters least to her labour and to her husband. Elizete's imaginary reconstruction of her body within the new space of Maracaibo suggests that the corporeal, the most localized site in which the self performs, is determined by larger spaces. That her body can be transformed into the

vehicle of her flight also implies that neither her surface identity nor her interior self are necessarily fixed.

While Elizete's fantasy life in the peace of the sand quarry is unachievable in reality, her dreams of rebellion and escape are realized in the peace she finds with Verlia. Elizete's love for Verlia is in part a desire to move into a different space, one that is free of both economic and sexual violence. When she describes her first sexual encounter with Verlia, Elizete eroticizes Verlia's body by representing it in the language of consumption and escape: "I abandon everything for Verlia. I sink in Verlia and let she flesh swallow me up. I devour she. She open me up like any morning" (5). Whereas in the sand quarry Elizete's body exploded with the pain of suffering, here it explodes with the pleasure of desire. Elizete represents her sexual encounter with Verlia as a means for her body to disappear into the other woman's, as an opportunity for her to reciprocate by consuming Verlia's body, and as an awakening in which her surface is ruptured: Elizete's interior breaks through her exterior and this sexual encounter allows her to reposition her self in relation to her environment. Her sexual awakening coincides with Elizete's political and cultural awakening. She states that before meeting Verlia she lived in a sleeping, trance-like state, but that after their encounter "[e]verything make sense from then the way flesh make sense settling into blood" (6). The cultural effects of Elizete's sexual experience coincide with Judith Butler's argument that "[t]hose sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines" (132). By reinscribing her body outside of the dominating forces of her labour and her marriage, Elizete manages to position her self differently in relation to the gendered hierarchies of production and reproduction.

Through her experience of loving another woman, Elizete begins to conceive of possibilities that her inscription in a gender-defined space did not previously allow. In her natal place, Elizete experiences the homelessness of her body as well as a

displacement in the larger environment. Before she meets Verlia and imagines the other woman's body as a means to redefine her self and to escape to a new place, Elizete's body can only perform as either a labourer or as a sexual subordinate. Her only respite is to fantasize about reconstructing her body in flight, but this dream cannot be realized until Elizete is able to reinscribe her body outside of dominant heterosexual and economic social laws. Once she defies the sexual normalization of her body, and in so doing finds a 'home' in Verlia, Elizete begins to understand her economic oppression. Verlia has arrived at the plantation to organize the workers into a socialist uprising and she works beside them in the fields to gain their trust. As Elizete watches Verlia in the fields, she realizes that her lover can provide her with access to a different reality: "She eyes move as if she was busy going somewhere, busy seeing something and all this cane all this whipping and lashing was a hindrance. Then like a purposeful accident she eyes rest on me, and she face open, them big teeth push out to laugh for me, sweat flying, she fall again to the cutlass" (16). Although Verlia performs the same work that Elizete despises, she recognizes that Verlia cuts cane for a different reason: she labours in order to put an end to the labour. Verlia's body, then, represents alternatives to Elizete's experiences in the realms of both labour and sexuality. By uniting her own body with Verlia's, Elizete begins to articulate her self in ways that defy the inscription of her body according to the gendered hierarchies perpetuated by the space of the plantation.

After Verlia dies, Elizete travels to Toronto in an effort to inhabit the same space as did her lover. When Elizete arrives in Toronto, she is situated by other people in terms of the labour that Black female immigrants are expected to perform: "She'd been told about kitchens and toilets and floors and sewing machines and cuffs and rubber and paint spray and even been offered some sidewalks but nobody told her about any place she wouldn't fit in" (49). These narratives of workplaces are of sites in which Elizete will 'fit in,' places where she will find others whose bodies speak their gender and racial differences and where her identity will match those of the collective. Before Elizete turns

to the type of work which the city demands of her body and which she will share with other Black women, however, she lives in a state of homelessness on the outskirts of the city. Elizete spends her first few weeks inhabiting a shopping mall in suburban Toronto. She manages to find food and hide from the mall security and police by constantly roaming through the mall and its surrounding streets. Brand's choice of this space as the site of Elizete's first experiences in the city magnifies her more general critique of the loneliness and dispossession subjects experience when they are unable to enter capitalism. Elizete's dispossession in the shopping mall emphasizes that she is outside of a set of capitalistic social relations in which wealth and consumerism are the hallmarks of fulfillment. Lauren Langman discusses the connections between such social relations and individual subjectivities when she analyses the proliferation of shopping malls in post-modern cultures. Langman argues that

Everyday life has been transformed into an extension of consumer capitalism and the person rendered a consumer or spectator in whom the commodified meanings, the symbolic and affective values embedded in the sign system, have been interiorized as representations of reality. The ideology of consumerism promotes the good life, good feelings and good selfhood. (47)

It is this very ideology of consumerism which Elizete cannot enter, and it is because she cannot participate as a consumer that she is unable to attain the model of the good life implied in the space of the shopping mall. The first site of her homelessness in the city establishes the ways in which Elizete is prevented from entering into the social space by the very relations which constitute that space.

Although the shopping mall is a place that does not demand labour from her, Elizete nevertheless sees signs in her new space of the way her body will be regulated to work in the near future:

Everything she saw was raw, caked over with grime, the raw promise of trade the whole night, giving up the part of your body that was worth nothing and something all at once and hoping no one would take you up on it, not for a lousy drink, not with the beer spilling on the tables, the stink of the place, not with your eyes avoiding the floor and the corners and the man next to you who says he has a



room, his pores waxed over, fused into paste with booze. But all that was perhaps later for Elizete. Another life. Not today. Today she was Columbus, today the Canadian National was not the Canadian National yet and the Gladstone was not a bar and nothing had a name yet, nothing was discovered. (47)

Elizete's first perceptions of the city may occur on its outskirts and without an understanding of the larger place, or even of the names of the sites around her, but she nonetheless recognizes that here her body is worth "nothing and something," just as it was on the plantation. The narrator's description of Elizete as being like Columbus in her exploration of an unnamed foreign world also recalls Elizete's childhood struggle to name her environment in the Caribbean after her ancestor, Adela, has stripped the oppressive place of its names. In her childhood, Elizete understood the medicinal utility of the plants in her environment before she knew the established names for them; she did not require spoken language to ascribe meaning to her space. Similarly, in her adult life in the city, Elizete perceives the meanings of her environment prior to her knowledge of that space in language. Although in both situations Elizete's position outside discourse may situate her outside established knowledge, she constructs meanings for her environments based on how they affect her body.

While the above passage hints that Elizete's body may be forced to perform sexual labour, Elizete eventually finds out that in the city her body must participate in an economy which is gendered and racialized in ways that increase her sexual vulnerability. Her economic subservience that is indicated by her bodily identity and enacted within the social and spatial sphere of the city situates Elizete as powerless against sexual violence. Like the other Black women immigrants with whom she lives after finding her way into the city, Elizete's only avenue of work is one in which "every part of the body [is] put to use like a hammer or a bucket, every part emptied like a shelf or a doorway" (82). In order to survive in the city, however, Elizete must transform her physical appearance. She must contain her body and restrict it with "so much coil and curl, so much fold, hedge, girdle" that "the body doesn't move any more, don't do nothing called moving" (82). The body that becomes the instrument of her work must fit itself into the clothing

that will contain it in a respectable way for factory labour. In order to cope with “the cave of her belly crumbling in a girdle” (83) and the regulated movements that this creates, Elizete realizes that she must separate her private self from her public body: “Call this living. This ain’t no living. This is where you do that Black woman trick. Squeeze water from a stone, steel your Black woman self to bear the street, hope for another century, make something that can last another age, something that can wait, for some light” (83). Elizete achieves this split between her present circumstances and a better future, between her corporeal and her imaginative lives, by denying those who have power over her body any access to her interior self.

Elizete pretends to lose her hearing at work so that, while her body may continue to perform its labour, she can ignore her master’s commands. Elizete first protects her self by assuming the name Gloria, and then by refusing to respond to this false name when her white male supervisor refers to her by it. As her supervisor calls Elizete by her pseudonym, she thinks that

This white man in front of me don’t know anything about me. What he think already of a Black woman gluing the soles of shoes in his factory? I look square into his white face and it come to me. I put my hand, my left hand, to my ear tapping it. (85)

By pretending that she is deaf at work, Elizete does not have to respond to the white man when he calls her by the assumed name that signifies her new identity in the new place. Although she may not have the power to chose the form of her labour or to reinscribe her body within social regulations, Elizete does have control over the performances of her interior self in her workplace. She separates her inner subjectivity from its surface appearances first by asserting her power to re-name her body, and then by refusing to acknowledge this new name. Twice defended from having her body signify her subjectivity, Elizete thus disengages her self from both her body and the social space it occupies.

Because the city demands the kind of work that her body performs, Elizete can never enjoy the freedom of choosing her position within that space or of feeling a sense of belonging to it. Elizete reflects that she is now “waking in the dark, and going home in the dark where morning and night were the same and no part of the day governed any more by nature, no sleep that was finished, no waking complete. Truth is she hardly knew where she was” (87). Whereas her life in the Caribbean was overdetermined by nature, her sexual and economic oppression represented as too tightly bound to working the earth, in the city Elizete’s work leaves her disoriented in relation to nature and in a state between sleep and wakefulness. The labour that she must perform in order to survive positions Elizete as a transient in her new ‘home’, moving between her house and her workplace without a sense of belonging to the larger city. The gender and racial differences marked by Elizete’s body situate her within realms of labour in which her body must perform to meet her basic material needs and which also constrain her body and limit its movements. It is perhaps because her spatial circumstances in both her natal and adoptive places determine Elizete’s identity through her body, and her interior life becomes consumed with the relations of the microspace of her body to its immediate environment and other bodies, that Elizete seems unaware of the macrospace of nations. Elizete travels between the borders of her Caribbean nation and Canada ‘illegally’ and does not obtain the official documents required for her to work in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Elizete does not seem aware of the national borders between the canefield and the city or of the larger political spaces which circumscribe her own and other’s bodies. It is because she is an ‘illegal’ immigrant as well as because she is a Black female, however, that Elizete lacks the freedom to choose her labour or to experience a sense of belonging to Toronto.

The combination of her identities, which are determined by Elizete’s body and by the laws of larger spatio-social spheres, also situate her as sexually vulnerable. The sexual violence Elizete suffered under Isaiah is replicated by men in Toronto. Elizete is first raped in her own room by a man she does not know, but who perceives his power

over her because of her status as an 'illegal' immigrant: "He says this is the procedure, he says you have no rights here, he says I can make it easier for you if I want, you could get sent back" (89). While her transience and poverty leave Elizete with no material goods worth stealing, the narrator states that her body holds some value within the sexualized politics of violence to which Black female immigrants are particularly vulnerable. While men may have threatened Elizete before, "[t]his time they searched her skin, this time they found nothing and took it, too" (89). The first time Elizete is raped in Canada, her powerlessness to resist or report the crime is connected to her 'illegal' status within the nation's borders. Elizete needs to stay in Canada in order to work, and, as in the Caribbean, she must suffer the sexual brutalization of her body in order to be able to meet her subsistence needs.

The second time that she is raped, the site where the rape occurs is also the site of the sexual and economic violence suffered by Elizete's body. Elizete starts cleaning house, which she considers a preferable job to working in a factory under the scrutiny of a white boss, for a man who subsequently rapes her. While he violates her body, Elizete imagines that it is filling up with sand. Just as she separates her interior life from her body by feigning deafness in the factory, at this workplace Elizete defends her self from her body that is being violated: "When he raped her she thought of sand, her face in the sand, the particles flying down her nostrils into her lungs; she thought of the quarry and sand so thick it caked off like brick. She felt her lungs fill up and stiffen with sand. She felt her breath thicken, dense to sand" (90-91). Elizete imaginatively leaves her body behind and retreats to the safer place of the sand quarry. Elizete imagines that it is the sand, and not the rapist, that consumes her body and returns her to the earth and the peace of death. By separating her body from her interior life, Elizete estranges her self from its physical performances. The narrator describes Elizete's alienation from the intimate space of her body in the statement that, "If she's losing every part of herself then what part feels this, which limb and which sense; whose breath is she breathing with, whose eyes is she

using now. Who is in her body making sand, grinding glass” (92). When her body is sexually violated in a workplace that already constrains her body according to its gender and race, Elizete escapes her physical position completely through retreating mentally to a space that consumes her and in which the sand displaces the man. In the canefield and in the city Elizete’s body is regulated by economic and sexual powers to the extent that her body becomes the most localized site of her homelessness.

Although the metropolitan city and the peripheral canefield may appear to be very different socio-economic spaces, Elizete’s experiences in both indicate that they are similar in their construction of subjectivities according to the economic and sexual regulations imposed on bodies. The social controls that inscribe performances of the body according to labour rely on gender and racial hierarchies that are inherited from the imperial past. Elizete begins to recognize that both her locations and her subjectivity are constructed by the history of slavery: “Impermanence, which perhaps you felt all along. Perhaps it was built into you long before you came and coming was not so much another place but travelling, a continuation, absently, the ringing in your ears of iron bracelets on stones, the ancient wicked music of chain and the end of the world” (65). Elizete articulates that she belongs to neither her natal nor her adoptive home because both spaces are shaped by the history of slavery. The spaces that Elizete inhabits are not fixed in the meanings that they hold for her, but are instead constructed around her perceptions and inherited memories of the social relations which they inscribe.

When she reflects on the isolation that she feels in the city, Elizete considers that “[a] place was tangible like a thought. You could lengthen it, fatten it, flailing legs scale it, return to it, greedy, eat it. It smelled of some odour, mixtures, it filled your breath, it was appealing and disgusting” (70). Places are, for Elizete, as complex and dynamic as the subjectivities that inhabit them. The constant state of impermanence which she articulates as her cultural inheritance also suggests that each place is constructed in relation

to the other places which subjects have inhabited. Geographer Doreen Massey explains this relationship between the construction of identities and places when she argues that

the identity of a place is formed out of social interrelations, and a proportion of those interrelations -- larger or smaller, depending on the time and on the place -- will stretch beyond that 'place' itself. In that sense, if social space is conceived of as constructed out of the vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global, then 'a place' is best thought of as a particular part of, a particular moment in, the global network of those social relations and understandings. (115)

Toronto may be a city in which Elizete feels isolated and in which she longs for escape to her more familiar birth place, but she also recognizes that "[a]ll the places with someone, some relative, some known stranger, all those places had chewed her up so perhaps she had found emptiness enough to fill her up here" (71). The hostility of the city towards Black female immigrants may force them to separate their selves from their bodies and leave them feeling empty, but Brand does not imply that these experiences can be countered with idyllic memories of a utopian birth place. Rather, both spaces regulate bodies and selves according to labour, and both the canefield and the city become spatialized representations of the historical past in which these regulations were constructed.

Because so many of Brand's characters migrate between spaces, generally emigrating from the Caribbean to Canada and only returning to the Caribbean temporarily, their relationship to the social and geographical spaces which they may inhabit at any one specific moment is always mediated by their construction of the other spaces through which their bodies have moved. Their identities are consequently as determined by this movement and displacement as they are by any sense of belonging to either a natal or adoptive 'home'. It is this sense of non-belonging to any one location that fuels the characters' desires to construct their spaces as homes, whether through imagining the Caribbean left behind with a false nostalgia or through constructing a Canada hostile to

immigrants as a place of hope and success. Carole Boyce Davies explains the emigrant's desire to construct a 'home' when she argues that

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. (1994: 113)

Brand's representation of her characters' desires to construct and rewrite their 'home' is a result of both their movement away from their natal place and of the knowledge that this place could never attain the sense of belonging that any utopian dreams of home may imply. Brand displays the ambiguities contained in the word 'home' when the narrator describes Elizete in Toronto living with another woman from the Caribbean. When she first moves into the house with the other woman, Elizete maintains a formality and distance that reveal her distrust of everyone in the city. Soon, however, Elizete finds it hard to resist talking to the other woman: "It took a while. It was hard to resist the sound of a phrase from home, hard to resist listening to each other suck their teeth when they came home from work" (79). The word 'home' in these lines refers to both the island where the two women were born and to the house in which they are now living. The way that this word shifts in signification from one space to another indicates the lack of available discourse to describe subjects' relationships to the spaces they inhabit as well as the possibility for multiple spaces to represent different meanings of the word 'home'.

One of the places in which it is possible for the subject to achieve selfhood and belonging is that of their imagination. John Clement Ball notes that over half of the stories in *Sans Souci* are set in a Toronto whose population may be racially diverse, but which Brand characterizes as 'white' in power (11). The characters in these stories are as overwhelmed by the city's racial hierarchy as is Elizete. The protagonist of "No Rinsed Blue Sky, No Red Flower Fences" responds to the social structure of the city by constructing a fantastical place to which she can escape which is also a non-place, a site

without geographical boundaries and in which the subject is not contained by the boundaries of her body. The narrator describes how the city that “could be so nasty when she had no money” not only limits the protagonist’s material status because of her race, but also leads to an internalized dejection and fragmentation (86). Poor and depressed, the protagonist dismembers herself when she states that

even her hands, as tender as they would have liked to have been, were frightened and upset at the order of things, inciting her face and head to sadness and then reproach for such weakness and then pity for her blackness and her woman’s body, and hopelessness at how foolish she was in not even being able to pay the rent, or fix her teeth, which she dreamt nightly fell out in her hands, bloodless. (86)

As she personifies her hands, this character alienates her body from her self and allows her hands to represent her social environment. Her hands speak the ways that the protagonist’s body is judged within the body politic as a site of sadness, weakness, pity, hopelessness, and even foolishness. The protagonist’s imaginary dismemberment of her own body reveals that her suffering is not only caused by her poverty and dispossession, but also by her self-hatred; she has internalized the dominant ‘readings’ of her body. In Toronto, the protagonist’s subjectivity is constituted around her own body and its pain, as well as around the way that she knows others perceive her exterior. The protagonist understands her body from the perspective of others in the city. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, “[t]he city provides the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies ... It is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced” (104). The city is a space in which the protagonist psychically dismembers her body and her self by entering her corporeality into the dominant discourses of the social space.

The image of the protagonist’s split body and self parallels the way that she is split from her children. The protagonist works as a nanny to white children and this labour reminds her “that she missed her children who were growing up far away without her”



(86). The narrator describes how the protagonist works as a surrogate mother to white children in order to perform as a parent to her own children and support them financially:

The little money fed her sometimes, fed her children back home, no matter the stark scene which she created on the corners of the street. She, black, silent and unsmiling; the child, white, tugging and laughing, or whining. (87)

Partly because she is an 'illegal' immigrant, and partly because of the gender and race marked on her body, the protagonist is relegated to being a domestic servant and expending her maternal energy on children who are not her own. In so doing, the protagonist recognizes that she does not belong to her larger social space: "She was always uncomfortable under the passing gazes, muttering to herself that she knew, they didn't have to tell her that she was out of place here. But there was no other place to be right now" (87).

Although she may be physically bound to the city, the protagonist creates an imaginative life in which she can escape her circumscribed life. Her longings to leave the city and go 'home' illustrate that the dismemberment caused by her physical difference is eased by constructing a past of her natal place which is false:

A peacock rattan chair sat under the poster of home. A girl in a wet T-shirt, the sea in back, the sun on her body, represented home. Home had never been like that, but she kept the poster. Its glamour shielded her from the cold outside and the dry hills back home at the same time. (89)

This image of an ideal fictive place contains real power in its ability to relieve the protagonist's fear of being discovered as an 'illegal' immigrant or being subjected to the coldness of the city. At the the same time, however, it relieves any nostalgia that she may feel for her birth place. The protagonist may gaze at the poster to try and remember her birth place as an idyllic 'home,' but the apparent glamour of the image serves to distort her memories of that past reality and positions her as an outsider viewing the images of the Caribbean constructed for the Western touristic gaze. The power of the image, therefore, is in the fantasy place that it represents, one which shields the protagonist from the poverty and alienation endemic to both her past and present social spaces.

Having no site other than this superficial image to project as a home, the protagonist creates one in her dreams. In these fantasies, the protagonist does not just fly but “swoop[s] down like a pelican into the water” (91), revealing that imagined alternatives can be sustaining to those estranged from their bodies and their environments. Although her material reality, ‘illegal’ status, separation from her children, and estrangement from her body are all reflective of a social reality, Brand does not represent this character as totally disenfranchised. Rather, she constructs a subjectivity in which the protagonist locates herself as more than a whole ‘self’, she encompasses *all* selves: “She played all the parts in her dreams. Dreamer, dreamed. She was female and male, neutral” (91). In her dream state, the protagonist is not limited to specific sites or bodies; she expands to encompass both genders and all subjectivities in an assertion of her ego that is denied to her in material reality. When she wakes up, the protagonist recognizes the superiority of this imagined state, in which she is simultaneously no-one and everyone, in both a non-space and in all spaces, to the smallness of her actual life. The narrator states

Dreamer remained the same and often less than dreamed. It would surprise her to awaken to her thin, unvoluptuous body, limited to the corner of the floor on which she slept. Dreamed would return to limitlessness and the dreamer, to the acute clarity of the real -- the orange juice, the telephone, the white Toronto street in winter. (91)

While the protagonist does not relate to either the city or her birth place as ‘homes,’ in her dream-state she expresses her desire to find a space where she can experience physical freedom and the realization of a full and even abundant subjectivity. The protagonist can not alter her waking reality, but in her dreams she is able to reassert all that this material life suppresses. Home, then, is impossible for the protagonist to construct in geographical spaces which have marked her body as different and which have relegated her to labour that is not only unprofitable, but which constantly reminds her of the ways in which she is split from her children and her self is betrayed by her body. Although she cannot physically inhabit a ‘home,’ Brand’s representation of the protagonist’s fantasy

life emphasizes that, when they are denied a geographical space to which they may feel a sense of belonging, subjects will construct an imaginary site in which there are neither spatial nor corporeal boundaries.

Brand's representation of the protagonist's identification with the 'nowhere place' of her dreams is also a representation of the Black female subject's inability to claim one geographical site as a place of origin or of belonging. While this dispossession is a result of the ways in which the social space regulates bodies hierarchically and determines the labour that they will perform, it is also a result of the subject's construction of her space in relation to its history and to other spaces. Massey argues that no space can be conceived of as isolated or authentic:

Because it is not just the present which is characterized by, molded by, interactions with the outside world, but also the history of the place, there is no singular origin ... There is no one essential past about which to get nostalgic ... [and] there is no one essential past to any place simply by virtue of the fact that there will always be differing interpretations even of any one moment in that past. (116)

Subjects attribute meanings to the spaces that their bodies inhabit in accordance with their interpretations of the social relations, both past and present, which occur in that space. It is because these social relations have been configured around bodily brutalization and harsh physical labour that the above characters reject both their birth and adoptive places and position themselves instead in subjective non-places. Any attempts to reposition bodies and selves within socio-spaces would thus require that the microspace of the body and the larger space which that body inhabits be reinscribed in ways that accommodate non-dominant subjectivities and histories.

It is this spatialization of past and present social relations in ways counter to dominant inscriptions that the narrator undertakes in *Land to Light On*. In the series of poems "Land to Light On," Brand suggests that the meaning of a specific place is contained in the subject's knowledge of its history. The speaker of poem Viii states that in order to see beauty in places, one must be able to separate the landscape from the

human relations which occur in that location. Commenting on the beauty of the sky, the speaker uses the generic second person to state that

skin falling away  
from your eyes, you see it without its history of harm, without  
its damage, or everywhere you walk on the earth there's harm,  
everywhere resounds. (45)

It is only when the eye can separate itself from the screen of skin, when it can see without being interrupted by the body, that space can be perceived as distinct from its history. The speaker then states that this kind of separation is not possible when the subject views space as resonating with the brutal history of imperialism:

This is the only way you will know  
the names of cities, not charmed or overwhelmed, all you see is  
museums of harm and metros full, in Paris, walls inspected  
crudely for dates, and Amsterdam, street corners full of  
druggists, ashen with it, all the way from Suriname, Curacao,  
Dutch and German inking their lips, pen nibs of harm blued in  
the mouth, not to say London's squares, blackened in statues,  
Zeebrugge, searching the belly of fish, Kinshasa, through an  
airplane window the dictator cutting up bodies grips the plane  
to the tarmac and I can't get out to kiss the ground. (45)

The only meanings which the speaker can attribute to spaces are those of the physical violence of imperial colonialism and its legacy of racism. The speaker cannot perceive cities as charming, just as she cannot perceive the beauty of landscape, because she perceives spaces through the lens of the corporeal: the metropolitan centers of Europe relegate the colonized to their economic periphery, while the African city of Kinshasa is dominated by the neo-colonial politics which limits and defiles the bodies of its occupants. No place, whether it is a rural landscape or an urban center, can be spatialized without the social relations it contains and perpetuates.

When the speaker in poem Vv states that she is "giving up on land to light on," then, she implies that this is because there is no promised land, that there are no spaces untainted by the brutal history of the body. The construction of space through political borders, she continues, is an artificial construction of geographical places in discourse:

It's paper,  
paper, maps. Maps that get wet and rinse out, in my hand  
anyway. I'm giving up what was always shifting, mutable  
cities' fluorescences, limbs, chalk curdled blackboards  
and carbon copies, wrenching water, cunning walls. Books  
to set it right. Look. What I know is this. I'm giving up.  
No offence. I was never committed. Not ever, to offices  
or islands, continents, graphs, whole cloth, these sequences  
or even footsteps (47)

The speaker rejects the maps which inscribe land as belonging to a particular state and which attempt to construct places through ideological representations and discourses. The last lines of the above passage indicate that the speaker rejects the idea of belonging to any one particular place at the same time that she rejects the very construction of places itself. The maps and books which encode spaces become representations of the artificial construction of bodies within borders. When the speaker states in an earlier poem in the sequence that "there is dirt somewhere older than any exile" (VII 44), she summarizes her belief that the geographical movement and displacement of bodies and selves is a construction of states; exile from a land is not a function of the place itself, but is rather an imposition of social relations onto geographical places. The speaker forsakes any hope of finding a paradisaal place where she will feel at 'home' because she recognizes that all available spaces are configured through hierarchical social relations and ideological representations.

Each of the characters discussed above subjectively inhabits 'nowhere places' at the same time as their bodies are very much located and regulated by specific socio-spaces. Although Brand is more concerned with the communities immediately surrounding her characters' bodies, primarily the Caribbean canefield and the metropolitan city, than she is with the national spaces in which they move, her deconstruction of the stability of space implies a critique of national borders. Her representation of non-belonging is inflected by the difficulty with which subjects can move between national borders and boundaries. Many of her characters situated in

Toronto are defined as 'illegal' immigrants as well as by the gender and race marked on their bodies. Their status outside of the laws which regulate belonging to a place is another way in which the characters' bodies are constrained and limited by their state. Brand's representation of the migrant subject's desire to move away from the artificial and ideological construction of spaces and into non-places where bodies are not bound to their location deconstructs the stability of both bodies and states. In so doing, she also challenges the notion that the social relations which occur within spaces can only be interpreted according to dominant ideologies. By denying her characters the ease of constructing their Caribbean birth places nostalgically and by refuting any myths of Canada as the immigrant's promised land, Brand represents these spaces as complex sites of subject formation in which there can be no easy identification between self and place, body and state. Rather, the tension between rejecting a 'home' and attempting to create a new one is played out in the subjective processes of attributing meaning to places and of recognizing how spatio-social regulations affect performances of the body and articulations of the self.

## **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Brand's representation of Elizete's position within this space coincides with Maria Mies's argument that human bodies create a circular relationship to nature through their labour:

The interaction between human beings and nature for the production of their human requirements needs, like all production, an instrument or a means of production. The first means of production with which human beings act upon nature is their own body. It is also the eternal precondition of all further means of production. But the body is not only the 'tool' with which human beings act upon nature, the body is also the aim of the satisfaction of needs. (52)

Elizete's body is just this kind of tool, one which works to meet the subsistence needs required by the body itself.

<sup>2</sup> Elizete's birth place goes unnamed throughout the novel, while the street and place names of Toronto are identified prominently. Brand's vagueness about which Caribbean island Elizete is from is unsettling in that it seems to generalize about the Caribbean as a whole. When Arun Mukherjee suggests that the island may be Grenada, which often appears in Brand's texts by name, she also recognizes that the lack of a specific name for the island may have an ideological affect on readers:

But since Grenada is nowhere mentioned by name, is Brand generalizing about the Caribbean as a whole? The loss of specificity, from my point of view, is troubling. It leaves open the possibility of depoliticized readings that will focus on the complexities of Brand's fragmented narrative and bypass its political passion. (Mukherjee 1997: 104)

Brand's lack of specificity about the Caribbean island may leave the reader unable to place events in the novel within a specific time and place, and this detachment from an actual social and historical context may, as Mukherjee suggests, shift the reader's attention away from Brand's ideological messages and towards her narrative technique. The opposite may be true of Brand's representation of Toronto, however, as her specificity about the city particularizes the narrative as it moves geographically North. The sections of the novel situated in Toronto cannot be generalized to any other city: Brand's critique of the racism and sexism of Toronto is specific to the labour relations and industries of that city.

## ***CHAPTER 5: Desire and the Body Erotic***

While the body that suffers and the self that is subjugated are the constituent elements of Brand's characters, she also represents how the agency-inhibiting regulations of subjectivity are never entirely total. Brand does insist that a full articulation of the self is impossible in dominant discourses and spaces, but she counters her critique of this public constitution of bodies with a representation of the private sphere of sexual desire. It is in the physical and psychic intimacy of desire that Brand's characters become empowered and can imagine ways to express themselves through the loving gestures of their bodies. Brand's characters achieve their greatest freedom and articulation of selfhood when they are able to eroticize the Black female body, both their own and their lover's. The self's eroticization of the Black female body may seem to be projected onto an other, but Brand frequently describes lesbian desire as having the affect of 'opening up' the self in ways that exceed the public regulation of its body. While Brand represents lesbian desire as a radical strategy which allows the self to experience her body 'for itself', she also situates these moments of resistance as fleeting. The corporeal experiences of the self's inner urges cannot completely overcome dominant regulations of the Black female body and subjectivity. For Brand, they are instead physical moments of empowerment which are incorporated into the characters' subjectivities and to which they can imaginatively return when they are once again positioned in the public sphere.

Brand represents the eroticization of the Black female body by Black female characters in the short story from *Sans Souci* titled "Madame Alaird's Breasts." While the adolescent narrator and her friends experience a desire for the body of their French teacher which is never realized physically, it does contribute to their realization that their own bodies are a potential site of pleasure. The schoolgirls' attraction to their teacher may appear to be projected onto the older woman, but this desire creates a hyper-awareness of the Black female body which returns their attraction for the other woman back to them and



which affects how they configure their own bodies within a larger sexual economy. Brand playfully juxtaposes the strangeness of a foreign language to the fledgling lesbian desire that the schoolgirls experience when gazing at their teacher. The voyeuristic schoolgirls who pay more attention to their teacher's breasts than to her instructions find that their entry into new linguistic terrain coincides with their entry into gazing at the female body:

We loved Madame Alaird's breasts. All through the conjugation of verbs - *- aller, acheter, appeller, and écouter* -- we watched her breasts as she rested them on the top of her desk, the bodice of her dress holding them snugly, her deep breathing on the *eu* sounds making them descend into their warm cave and rise to take air. We imitated her voice but our *eu*'s sounded like shrill flutes, sharpened by the excitement of Madame Alaird's breasts. (79)

As they strive to speak the same language as Madame Alaird, to mimic and repeat her French pronunciation, the schoolgirls also view her as the object of their desire. Although she always stood before them clothed, the narrator recalls that "Madame Alaird was almost naked as far as we were concerned" (81). The subjectivity of the narrator is defined by her dual position as both the viewing/desiring pupil of her teacher, and the lover who can never truly view her object or manifest that desire. To deal with this paradox, the narrator and her friends represent Madame Alaird imaginatively by creating a verbal narrative of their teacher that is more real to them than any truth about her. The narrator states that they "heard that Madame Alaird had children. Heard, as adolescents hear, through self-composition. We got few glimpses of Madame Alaird's life, which is why we made up most of it" (81).

When their teacher mysteriously enters a "gloomy period" evidenced by her apparent disregard for her appearance, her students match their disappointment in her physical decline with speculations about her private emotional life (82). The schoolgirls collectively transform their superficial knowledge of the teacher, their positioning of her as an object of desire, into a narrative of her private life:

“Madame Alaird looking like she catching trouble, eh?”  
 “By why she looking so bad?”  
 “It must be she husband, oui!”  
 “Madame Alaird don’t need he.”  
 “Is true! Madame Alaird could feed a country! How she could need he?”  
 “So he have Madame Alaird catching hell, or what?”  
 “Cheupss! You don’t see he could use a beating!”  
 “But Madame Alaird could beat he up easy, easy, you know!”  
 “You ain’t see how the head teacher watching she?”  
 “Hmmm!” (82-83)

Since the schoolgirls’ only real glimpse into their teacher’s personal life is a single sighting of her husband at the school, the narrator and her friends can only imagine their teacher’s interior life in relation to this man. They use Madame Alaird’s husband as a foil to their own relationship to the teacher and imagine him as both unnecessary and cruel in order to reinforce their own “protective” and adoring feelings towards her (82).

The narrator then describes how, months later, Madame Alaird mysteriously returns to her ‘normal’ self:

unaccountably, her mood changed. Unaccountably, because we were not privy to Madame Alaird’s life and could see only glimpses, outward and filtered, of what might be happening in it. But our stories seemed to make sense. And we saw her breasts. The only real secret that we knew about her life. (83)

Ironically, the teacher’s body seems to be much less of a secret to the schoolgirls than are her mysterious dejection and absent-mindedness. Because it is encoded as forbidden at the same time as it is on display at the front of the classroom, however, the schoolgirls take delight in their teacher’s sexuality and begin to excel in the foreign language in which it is expressed: “Madame Alaird’s breasts drove us to extremes. She was delighted with our conjugations, rapturous about our attentiveness. Her *Bonjour, mes enfants* were more fleshy and sonorous, her *eu’s* and *ou’s* more voluptuous and dark-honeyed. We glowed at her and rivalled each other to be her favourite” (83-84). Although the schoolgirls’ relationship to their teacher is either voyeuristic when she is before them, or speculative when she is absent from their sight, the gazes and the narratives through which they construct her fail to explain fully her interior and personal life. Unable to

know the body of the object of their desire, whom they also imagine as an acting subject in her private life, the schoolgirls hope to be recognized in their teacher's eyes by performing linguistically.

The humour of this story indicates the possibilities of representing the gaze as playful without diminishing the conflicts it produces in the formation of the seeing subject. That the teacher's exhibited body cannot be fixed as knowable and the narrator's voyeuristic subjectivity cannot be fixed as knowing leaves the narrator in a position where neither her gaze nor her words can contain their object. In their conversations that imagine Madame Alaird as a subject in a life beyond the classroom, the schoolgirls recognize that once she is out of sight the teacher is beyond their knowledge, and that her body may perform and interact with other bodies in ways that situate her as an agent. Although the schoolgirls' obsession with their teacher's breasts and the fantastical stories they make up about her are what lend this story its humour, Brand also inflects "Madame Alaird's Breasts" with serious concerns about representing women's desires for another woman's body. Because the seeing subjects in this story are adolescents whose bodies have yet to develop into maturity, the schoolgirls' longing for their teacher's body is also a longing for their own bodies to develop the breasts that will indicate their womanhood. The narrator recalls that "Madame Alaird's breasts gave us imagination beyond our years or possibilities, of burgundy velvet rooms with big legged women and rum and calypso music" (80). It is in this sense that the schoolgirls who gaze at their teacher are also looking at their own bodies; Madame Alaird's breasts hold fascination for them because the adolescents compare her body to their own.

This story locates the narrator and her friends in a dual relationship to Madame Alaird: the girls want to be her and they want to supplant Mr. Alaird. The way in which the girls imagine resolving this dual position, in which their desire for the subject of their gaze is also a desire to become her, is through becoming Madame Alaird's 'favourite' in the classroom. By courting her professional affection for them, the girls seek to attract

their teacher's attention and to become more like her by mastering the language which she represents in the classroom. While in their imaginative lives the girls may 'know' their teacher, in daily reality they recognize that they never will be able to replace her husband. Instead, they strive to 'know' her by becoming her, to manifest their desire for the other by transforming the self to be more like the imagined love object. In her reflections on the writing of this story, Brand states that "[f]or me the most radical strategy of the female body for itself is the lesbian body confessing all the desire and fascination for itself. 'Madame Alaird's Breasts' was my first overt admission of that desire and also an honest rendering of what really happens" (1994: 46). The narrator's viewing and description of the excesses of her teacher's body -- her breasts "were like pillows" (80) -- celebrates the anatomical differences of the female body from the male body and becomes a source of pleasure which, because of the barriers between herself and her teacher, her private desires and their public censorship, she can only display through performing Madame Alaird's linguistic exercises.

Brand's association of a foreign language with the female desire for another woman's body, which is also the female desire for its own body, suggests that both lesbian desire and representations of the female body 'for itself' cannot be sustained in familiar discourses. The exoticized sounds of the French language become allied with the strangeness of the teacher's body and of the schoolgirls' feelings for it. In order to see and describe her desire for the teacher's body, the narrator reconfigures both the corporeal and its internal life as excessive. This representation displays what Teresa de Lauretis identifies in texts by and about lesbians as the discourse of a new sexual economy:

the struggle with language to rewrite the body beyond its precoded, conventional representation is not and cannot be a reappropriation of the female body as it is, domesticated, maternal, oedipally or preoedipally en-gendered, but is a struggle to transcend both gender and 'sex' and recreate the body other-wise: to see it perhaps as monstrous, or grotesque, or mortal, or violent, and certainly also sexual, but with a material and sensual specificity that will resist phallic idealization and render it accessible to women in another sociosexual economy. (150)

In this passage, de Lauretis argues that the lesbian libidinal economy which reconstructs the female body in ways that resist phallic idealization does so through sight: to write the female body in new ways requires seeing it in new ways. Brand represents Madame Alaird's body as the site of physical excess to reconfigure the female body in a way that resists its containment and which opens up a sexual economy in which men are absent, and which is therefore distinct from the heterosexual economy in which they imagine Madame Alaird participates with her husband.

The desire represented in "Madame Alaird's Breasts" is never enacted through the bodies of the characters. It remains within the cognitive realm of the imagination and only enters into the public sphere through the girls' attempts to excel at the foreign language which is their currency to purchase Madame Alaird's affections. Language becomes a substitute for the girls' private experiences when they must perform in public in ways that mask their desire. Brand's emphasis on the importance of language in the subject's experience of desire also extends to her representation of desire which is realized physically. Whereas the schoolgirls gazing at Madame Alaird use language as both a shield for their inner feelings and as a substitute for them, in *In Another Place, Not Here*, Elizete describes how, once sexual desire is realized, language loses its ability to contain the desiring body. When she describes her intimacy with Verlia, Elizete says: "I wouldn't call nothing that we do love because love too simple. All the soft-legged oil, all the nakedness brushing, all the sup of neck and arms and breasts. All that touching. Nothing simple about it. All that opening like breaking bones" (78). Although she begins by cataloguing the sensuality of their love, its tactile inscription on the surfaces of their bodies, Elizete concludes with an image that cracks the surface and suggests that the corporeal is ruptured violently to reveal its interior. Elizete describes her desire in the metaphor of a physical breach to imply that her desiring self breaks the surface of her body in a gesture of excess and uncontainability which is in direct opposition to the ways that the regulating sphere confines her body. The heterogeneities of her desire are

represented spatially as an 'opening' of the body whose contents are too complex to be described in any other way.

The word 'love' cannot contain the magnitude of Elizete's experience of desire. The inscription of lesbian desire on both the surface and the interior of the female body demands representation in language that resists signifying the body as fixed or knowable. As Elizete remarks, "Love was too simple and smooth and not a good enough name for it" (75). The usual language to describe her experience with Verlia is inadequate for Elizete because it implies the simplicity and the seamlessness with which heterosexual desire is enacted in dominantly heterosexual social spaces. Elizete's sexual experience with Verlia breaks through these dominant regulations and reorients her body as a social place within an alternative sexual and subjective world. Elizete's rejection of the standard language of love and sexual intimacy is also a rejection of the differentiation between two desiring subjects which it implies. Elizete recognizes that to call what she and Verlia do 'love' would be to suggest that she feels, and enacts through her body, desire *for* Verlia, that the inner and physical experience is a movement away from the self and towards an other. The implication that the language of love is built on notions of difference, which Elizete resists by describing her sexual intimacy as a rupture which explodes the self rather than directing it towards the other, is explained by Catherine Belsey: "'I love you' obliterates the difference, the uniqueness of the desire it sets out to capture, and affirms the difference it sets out to efface, the gap between *I* and *you*, which necessarily invests the performance with a certain solitariness" (685). Elizete rejects the standard language of love and, in so doing, she rejects the gap between the self and the other which Belsey identifies as a form of solitariness.

While Brand represents lesbian desire as resisting the solitariness embedded in the dominant language of love and as redirecting the self's desire for the other back to the self, she does not represent lesbian desire as wholly utopian. Elizete may find immediate relief from the outside world in the space which she creates with Verlia, but this space is

neither permanent nor entirely distinct from the pressures of the larger space. The rupturing of her body and the emergence of a new self which Elizete experiences with Verlia in private is only significant because it occurs in opposition to the ongoing and repetitive public regulation of her body and self. Brand juxtaposes representations of the public and private uses of the Black female body to emphasize that lesbian desire can be a means to resist social laws, that the subject's actions in private are informed by how her body is positioned in public life. Brand's representation of Elizete reveals that the uses to which the Black female body is put in the regulative sphere are exploitative. She also illustrates, however, that in a non-exploitative sphere of desire Elizete's self can exceed the limits of her body. In the larger socio-space, the Black female body, desired sexually by men and forced into physical labour, is situated as a means to an end: the labour value and the procreative value of Elizete's body in both the Caribbean and in Canada serve the sexual economy of her socio-space. When Elizete is able physically to enact her desire for Verlia, however, her body performs within an alternative sexual economy in which the Black female body is desired for itself, as its own end. In these moments of desire, Elizete's body represents a value to herself which exceeds both its labour and its procreative value in the larger sphere.

Throughout the novel, Elizete uses the word 'grace' to describe these possibilities of selfhood and to posit an alternative sexual economy which Verlia represents. The novel opens with this word when, as the reader can later piece together, Elizete describes the quality that she perceives in both Verlia's body and in her inner character:

Grace. Is grace, yes. And I take it, quiet, quiet, like thieving sugar. From the word she speak to me and the sweat running down she in that sun, one afternoon as I look up saying to myself, how many more days these poor feet of mine can take this field, these blades of cane like razor, this sun like coal pot. Long as you have to eat, girl. I look up. That woman like a drink of cool water. (3)

While this passage most immediately develops the meaning of the word 'grace' as a referent for the movements of Verlia's body which Elizete perceives as elegant and

beautiful, it also introduces the variant and complex meanings of the word 'grace' which Brand develops over the course of the narrative. Sandra Martin argues that Brand uses 'grace' to describe "a moment of joy or lust" (71). While Elizete does imply this meaning in the above passage, in which the grace of Verlia's body in movement incites Elizete's joy or lust, Brand also uses 'grace' to connote its alternate meaning of mercy. Verlia offers Elizete a respite from her labour and sexual subordination; her gift of 'grace' in the sense of clemency holds a value which is not measurable in the sexual economy which controls Elizete's body and self.<sup>1</sup> Verlia's 'grace' is both a physical and an interior quality through which Elizete can transcend the brutality of her physical life and the subjugation of her interior life.

Because Verlia shows Elizete this mercy and relieves her from her physical and psychic suffering in the canefield, her gift of 'grace' provides Elizete with a spiritual epiphany. The word 'grace' consequently echoes the Christian idea of Divine Grace and, through this allusion, situates Verlia as Elizete's messiah. When Elizete reflects that "[m]aybe Verlia had simply come at the right time but that was what grace was. Everything changing for good" (74), she endows Verlia with the ability to change 'everything' and to intervene in her life with a power that Elizete has never previously known in another person. Later in the narrative, Elizete reflects on how following Verlia into the Revolution was her only alternative to her life in the canefield: "If she could not go with this woman, whose speed she loved, who was all liquid, whom she took and agreed was her grace, her way of leaping into another life, then she could not live in any way worthwhile" (113). Elizete's desire for the other woman may be enacted through physical gestures, but this bodily experience results in a spiritual rebirth in which Elizete moves out of her own existence and "into another life." Elizete is delivered from her suffering by Verlia because it is through the other woman that she begins to imagine her body within an alternative and non-exploitative social space.<sup>2</sup> This allusion to Christian theology in Brand's representation of Verlia aligns her with the Divine Grace that can



relieve an individual's suffering and allow her to be spiritually reborn. Like Christ, Verlia is the water of life to Elizete, she is "all liquid" and she has the ability to set prisoners free. Elizete implies this meaning of the word 'grace', however, at the same time that she uses it to refer to physical elegance and beauty. Throughout the narrative, Elizete perceives Verlia in terms of both her body and her interior psyche to configure lesbian desire as both a physical performance and as a transformation of the self: Verlia displays physical grace, she offers Elizete grace, and she is Elizete's grace. The deliverance which she experiences through her desire for Verlia is, for Elizete, an opportunity to reconstruct her self and to allow this new subject to break through the confines of her body.

Brand's fictional representation of lesbian desire has much in common with Luce Irigaray's theoretical formulation of lesbian desire. In her essay "Commodities among Themselves," Irigaray argues that the lesbian act is a radical one because it positions the desiring subject outside of a masculine and heterosexist market economy. Irigaray positions women as commodities within this market because she believes that within patriarchal economies all exchanges take place between men: the social order depends upon women being "signs, commodities, and currency [who] always pass from one man to another" (Irigaray 192). Because women are objects and not agents, and because a patriarchal economy is constructed as much on heterosexual exchanges as it is on market exchanges, Irigaray argues that women are normalized into only entering heterosexual relationships, into never being able "to go to 'market' on their own, enjoy their own worth among themselves" (196). Women may not be able to participate in a patriarchal sexual economy, but Irigaray speculates what might happen if, instead of trying to become masculine agents, women both refused to participate in a masculinist heterosexual economy and attempted to create a different sort of commerce altogether. It is in such a woman-centered homosexual economy, Irigaray argues, that the female body loses its procreative and labour value and assumes a new, inherent value:

Use and exchange would be indistinguishable. The greatest value would be at the same time the least kept in reserve. Nature's resources would be expended without depletion, exchanged without labor, freely given, exempt from masculine transactions: enjoyment without a fee, well-being without pain, pleasure without possession. (197)

Irigaray's argument for the blurring of the lesbian body's use and exchange values in a new sexual economy is similar to Brand's representation of the alternate ways in which Elizete begins to value her own body and Verlia's. Through the various forms of 'grace' which Verlia represents, Elizete is able to move outside masculine transactions and into the kind of lesbian libidinal economy which Irigaray imagines in the passage above.

Verlia may help Elizete reposition her self in a non-exploitative sphere where her body has an intrinsic value, but Brand does not suggest that the realm of lesbian desire is completely utopian or that Verlia can wholly stand in for a new messiah. The lesbian economy which Brand suggests is available to the women when their bodies perform the gestures of lesbian desire can only occur within private spaces and cannot defeat the masculinist and heterosexist economy. Although Elizete's desire for Verlia returns the attraction back to her and allows her self to break through the regulations of her body, Brand represents this reorientation as a temporary moment of resistance that cannot endure or overcome the larger market and sexual economies in which the women are positioned. Elizete may perceive Verlia as a 'better' form of her self and their love-making may efface the differences that characterize heterosexual regulations, but Elizete and Verlia cannot ever completely subvert difference into sameness. The narrator describes this difference from Elizete's perspective:

Of course there was a distance between them that was inescapable and what [sic] they did not talk about. At times she saw someone she did not know in Verlia. Someone too cool, not from here, someone who felt pity for people less capable. How could she know Verlia. (54)

Elizete may find relief in her desire for Verlia, but she can never 'know' her lover.

Although Brand appears to represent lesbian desire as a means for the subject to realize herself through loving another Black woman, as a means to love the other as a form of the

self, she avoids the threat of narcissism by insisting on the differences lesbian desire acknowledges.

The difference which Elizete perceives between herself and Verlia is that produced by class. Elizete and Verlia may be able to achieve sameness in their race and gender, but they are different in their social status, education, and ability to locate their activities in terms of a global map. Elizete speaks differently from Verlia: her narrative is in nation language while Verlia's is in Standard Received English. The two women may be able to understand each other, but the languages they speak are a reflection of the degree to which each character has received a formal education. Elizete travels between nations without recognizing that she crosses national borders, while Verlia takes on revolutionary acts as part of a global struggle for liberation. Verlia is Elizete's messiah because she can offer Elizete the privileges of a higher social class, one whose members can escape the degradation of physical labour and who locate their activities within a larger intellectual and political movement. Whereas hegemonic models of desire require sameness of race and class and difference of gender, Brand challenges these models by representing sameness of race and gender and difference of class. Although Elizete may despair that she will never truly 'know' Verlia, Brand does suggest that desire between two Black women of different classes is ultimately positive: it allows for social consciousness-raising and it is a means for Black women to elevate the status of other Black women. The desire between Elizete and Verlia, then, is founded on the biological sameness as well as on the difference in experiences marked on their bodies. While they are both Black women, Elizete's body is shaped by her labour whereas Verlia's body reflects the youthfulness of a body which has never been forced to work. The love between Elizete and Verlia that crosses class lines requires this difference, Brand implies, to reinforce each woman's desire for the other and to affirm the solidarity of their gender and race. Their desire is a celebration of the union of two Black women, but the attraction between Elizete and Verlia is as much the desire for the other as it is for the self.<sup>3</sup>

Like the schoolgirls whose desire for their teacher is also a desire to become her, Elizete's desire for Verlia is also a desire to transcend her own body and space and enter into that of her lover. Like the schoolgirls, Elizete's desire for an other has the effect of enhancing her awareness of her own body and its potential as a site of pleasure. And, like the schoolgirls, despite this apparent conflation of the self and the desired other, Elizete can never really 'know' her love object. Lesbian desire and its physical enactment may provide Elizete with an alternative array of performances from those inscribed on her body in the exploitative sexual marketplace, but this non-exploitative sphere is neither idyllic nor permanent. Rather, it allows Elizete to construct an imaginative space in which she can represent her body as valuable for itself and in which her body exceeds the language and the social laws in which it is usually inscribed.

In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand configures the eroticized Black female body as exceeding regulations and as signifying the subjective life it contains as excessive and uncontainable. In contradiction to the dominant troping of the Black female body, Brand's representations of desire focuses on the interior life of the Black woman. It is the interior life, and not only the body, which potentially exceeds dominant representations. Elizete's physical gestures of desire are performances of an interior desire which cannot be 'read' on her body when it is positioned in public exploitative spaces. The alternative performances of her body which she enacts in private are, however, ultimately as disorienting for Elizete as they are empowering: because the moments of her desire are fleeting and her private pleasure is always experienced in relation to her public suffering, Elizete must find a way to negotiate the two realms of her corporeal life. When Verlia's suicide/murder leaves her without access to the physical realm of her desire, and only with recourse to her imaginative reconstructions of it, Elizete embarks on her journey to Verlia's former home to try and locate her self once again in the redemptive space which Verlia represents. As she quickly discovers, however, the non-exploitative sphere of desire to which Verlia introduced Elizete was a temporary construction which cannot

overcome the exploitation of her body in the dominant social space. While Elizete's eroticization of Verlia's body and her own represents the transformative possibilities of lesbian desire, Brand does not suggest that the subject can retreat to this imaginative space permanently.

In poem VI of "hard against the soul" from *No Language is Neutral*, Brand suggests that the lesbian subject must harness the sense of selfhood she acquires during private moments of desire as a means to empower her self in the public sphere. Poems I to V in this series are love poems in which the speaker eroticizes her lover's body. She interrupts this thematic continuity in poem VI, however, to articulate how the pleasure of private desire does not annihilate the pain of public suffering and subjugation:

listen, just because I've spent these  
few verses fingering this register of the heart,  
clapping life, as a woman on a noisy beach,  
calling blood into veins dry as sand,  
do not think that things escape me,  
this drawn skin of hunger twanging as a bow,  
this shiver whistling into the white face of capital, a  
shadow traipsing, icy veined and bloodless through  
city alleys of wet light, the police bullet glistening  
through a black woman's spine in November, against  
red pools of democracy bursting the hemisphere's  
seams, the heart sinks, and sinks like a moon. (42)

While in the poems that precede this one, bodies are described in such terms of motion as "breasts to breasts mute prose we arc a leaping" (IV: 40), here the speaker moves from the intimate pleasures of the body to its public degradation in the outside world. The body becomes the site of starvation, spatial dislocation, and even murder as the speaker acknowledges that the momentary pleasures of desire cannot overcome the bloody and seemingly permanent fragmentation of the body within social space. The speaker, like Elizete, must shift between the empowering sphere of desire and the exploitative sphere against which that desire is constructed. While the speaker states that upon entering the state "the heart sinks, and sinks like a moon," this final simile implies that, just as the (symbolically feminine) moon waxes and wanes, the heart will rise again. The speaker of

“hard against the soul” may interrupt her eroticization of the Black female body with anti-utopian images of the body, but the final line of this poem suggests that desire and its corporealization provide her self with an alternative to the exploitation of the sexual marketplace.

When Brand writes sensually and erotically about lesbian desire, then, these aesthetic moments in her texts are also political acts. She juxtaposes the ‘grace’ of desire and the physical gestures of the body with the exploitative ways her characters’ same bodies are treated in the social space surrounding them. The pleasures the body experiences when it enacts desire, and the freedom that these private performances may allow for the self, are only significant because they occur in opposition to the suffering of the body and the subjugation of the self that Brand’s characters experience in public. While Brand juxtaposes private sexual pleasure with public suffering, however, she does not represent these two realms as entirely discrete. The union of two bodies in love-making may appear to efface the differences between selves, but Brand does not posit lesbian desire as a utopian sphere in which the Black female self may truly ‘know’ another or as a narcissistic act in which the self becomes the other. There are differences and gaps between two Black women, Brand suggests, that create their desire for each other and which in turn their desire may seek to overcome. As well, private lesbian desire can never wholly overcome the regulations of the body in public social spaces. Lesbian desire in Brand’s texts, then, is represented as an intensification of the Black female body and as a rupturing of the self through the confines of that body which may not entirely subvert the dominant social order, but which can create an alternate sphere to which the self may return imaginatively and where she may find some relief from her positioning in public space and discourses. Although every retreat to the realm of desire is temporary, their construction of a sexual economy in which the Black female body has inherent value allows Brand’s characters alternate bodily performances in which their selves do not capitulate to oppression. Desire, although it is neither utopian nor idyllic, reorients

Brand's characters to a private social place and allows performances of the body denied in their public struggles to claim selfhood.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brand anticipates her use of 'grace' as mercy in this novel in an earlier poem from *No Language is Neutral*. In poem II of the series "hard against the soul," the speaker concludes the love poem by eroticizing her lover's body and by then stating that her lover gives her grace in the form of forgiveness:

... I want to kiss you deeply,  
smell, taste the warm water of your mouth as warm as  
your hands. I lucky is grace that gather me up and  
forgive my plainness. (36)

<sup>2</sup> Brand's allusion to Christian theology is, on one level, a re-writing of Biblical misogyny and heterosexism to suggest that a messiah can appear in the form of a Black lesbian who performs her spiritual deliverance through lesbian desire. Makeda Silvera links the importance of Christian doctrine in Afro-Caribbean society to the social invisibility of lesbians. Writing specifically about Jamaica, she argues that

Although Christian values have dominated the world, their effect in slave colonies is particular. Our foreparents gained access to literacy through the Bible when they were being indoctrinated by missionaries. It provided powerful and ancient stories of strength, endurance and hope which reflected their own fight against oppression. This book has been so powerful that it continues to bind our lives with its racism and misogyny. Thus, the importance the Bible plays in Afro-Caribbean culture must be recognized in order to understand the historical and political context for the invisibility of lesbians. (1988: 37)

Brand's allusion to the Christian idea of Divine Grace is therefore not a simple re-writing of the Biblical doctrine to accommodate lesbian desire, but a complex echo of the Christian belief which may seek to reverse the Bible's racism and misogyny, but which also upholds the principle of Divine Grace in a recognition of the empowering affect Biblical myths have had on Afro-Caribbean peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Elizete's movement of desire from her self to an other and back again mirrors the movement of desire in Brand's literary project. When the narrative is constructed through Elizete's consciousness, Brand becomes (like Verlia) an educated and literate Black woman entering into the thoughts and desires of an illiterate and oppressed woman. Like Verlia, Brand enters into the life of another woman who is at once similar to her in race and gender, and dissimilar to her in class.



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